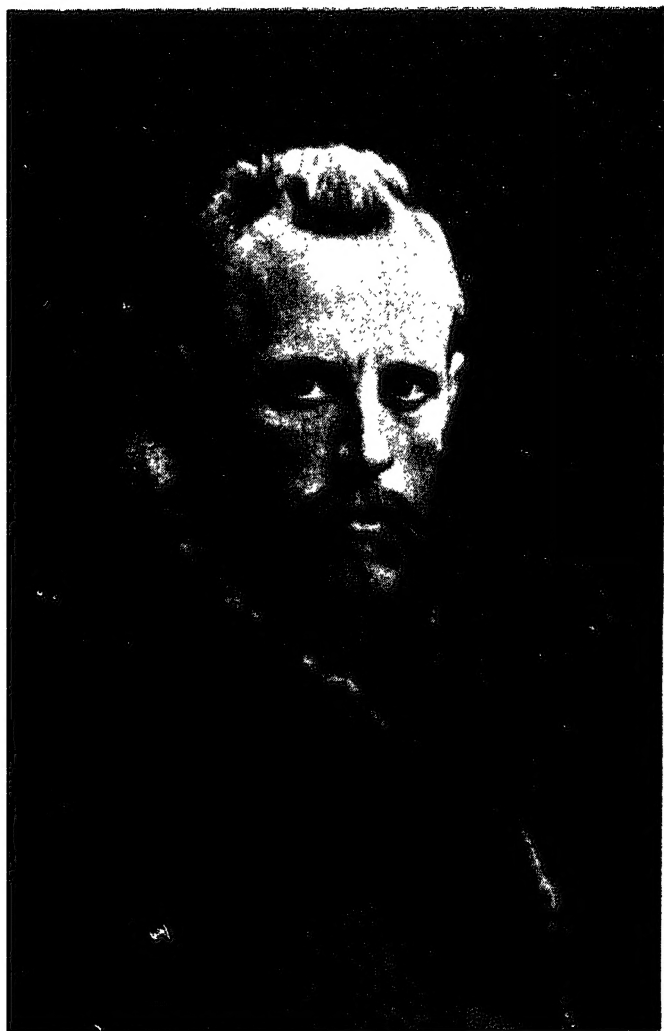


FRIDTJOF NANSEN

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Fridtjof Nansen
From a photograph

FRIDTJOF NANSEN

BY

B. WEBSTER SMITH

Author of "True Stories of Modern Explorers", &c.

*With Four Half-tone Plates
and Two Maps*

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FRIDTJOF NANSEN

CHAPTER I

Early Years

On a summer day about seventy years ago two little boys might have been seen in a country lane, aiming arrows at a squirrel in a tree, while their dog—after the habit of dogs from time immemorial—barked furiously around their legs, thereby distracting their attention and frightening away the game; but although the shafts fell fast and furious (and had occasionally to be retrieved by shinning up the tree) no squirrel fell to the budding Nimrods. At this set-back, which had occurred more than once, the younger boy, who was tall, thin, and inclined to be moody, fell into a brown study and presently resolved to try fresh methods. He made new arrow-heads by melting down bits of lead, and he dipped the points in the juice of toadstools, so as to make them more deadly (!), but still no squirrel's tail adorned his belt. At last it

dawned upon him that perhaps he was not shooting straight; and thereafter, whenever opportunity afforded, or when the matter entered his head (which was much the same thing in his case), he was to be seen practising at a mark, and eventually with a real gun, until at the proud moment when a moustache blossomed on his upper lip he had become a really first-class shot.

This boy was Fridtjof Nansen, and the incident of the arrows was characteristic of him. He could never endure to be beaten by difficulties, but always returned again and again to the charge, with what results we shall see later. The other boy was his elder brother; and the scene of their exploits was a wooded hill near Great Froen, a scattered village on the outskirts of Oslo (or Christiania, as it then was, and as we shall call it during most of this book). Their home was the brightly painted and well-kept cluster of buildings—partly dwelling-house, partly farm, with its yard, its chickens, its brewhouse, the cart-and tool-sheds, the sledges for hauling hay over the uneven, stony roads—which lay up a lane from the high-road, that was shaded by the filmy lacework of an avenue of birch trees which had been planted by the busy hands of Nansen's mother. At the foot of the hill the little river Frogner brawled and

tumbled and murmured, on its way to the sea near by; beyond lay the shining water of the fjord, with its wooded islets, its skerries, and many charming homes. Inland from Froen rose great rolling masses of hills, sunny and green now, but a very different sight in winter-time, when black clouds gathered ominously above them and the cold wet mists stole down into the dales. Up there, too, was the edge of the lonely forest, the home of elves and goblins, and peopled by all the horrors of giants and dragons with which the quick imagination of a myth-loving race had tenanted it; this place was forbidden ground to the Nansen boys.

Fridtjof had been named after his father, Baldur Fridtjof Nansen, a well-known lawyer in the city, who, like numerous other professional men of his country and time, combined a learned calling with the open-air life of the farm. The boy's mother, Adelaide, was Baldur's second wife. Fridtjof was born on 10th October, 1861, his father then being forty-four.

If there is any truth in the adage that "what is bred in the bone comes out in the flesh", young Nansen seemed destined for an adventurous life; because courage, boldness, activity both bodily and mental, marked much of the history of his ancestors. For instance, his grandfather four times

removed was Hans Nansen, a Dane, and burgo-master of Copenhagen, who, when that city was treacherously attacked by the Swedes in 1659, fought so well in its successful defence that King Frederick of Denmark presented him with his own sword upon the battlements. Earlier in life the same Hans Nansen had been something of an explorer too; like Fridtjof also he afterwards became involved in politics, for he aided the king to overthrow the Danish nobles, who at that date were intimidating their king and oppressing their countrymen. It is singular that whereas the elder Nansen thus placed a king more firmly on his throne, the younger was destined to help clear another off it! Another of Fridtjof's ancestors, a Captain Hvitfelt, of the Danish navy, upon finding his ship alight, blew her up, and himself with her, in order to save the rest of the fleet.

The boy's mother was an accomplished skier, and on her side too the political instinct was strong, for she belonged to the Wedel-Jarlsbergs, one of whom—Count Herman—had taken on the heavy task of governing Norway immediately after its unpopular union with Sweden in 1814. However, these were the sum total of Fridtjof's advantages in life; in Norway there were no hereditary nobility, no titles or class distinctions of any sort,

and no passing on of great estates from father to son. Upon a father's death his property was divided amongst his children, and the sons had to make their own way in the world—a very excellent system indeed, believe me, and one which produced, among other eminent men, the subject of this biography. Similarly with the ladies. Nansen's mother cut out her children's clothes, and herself did most of the household sewing and machining, while her boys were compelled alternately to wait at table. All of this would have been unthinkable to English ladies of the same status at that date. This sense of equal burdens and equal rights, which was thus early engrained in Fridtjof Nansen, bore fruit later, during the memorable voyage of the *Fram*.

There were times when it did not appear likely that the boy would survive the perils of childhood. Not that he was a sickly lad—on the contrary, apart from occasional fits of moodiness and abstraction, he was an uncommonly healthy and virile boy, but he was always in mischief, and not infrequently it was dangerous mischief too. At the age of three he set himself on fire by accident; some years later he nearly blew his face off with gunpowder; while, during his student years, how he escaped death by drowning, or when wandering

alone about the treacherous ice-fields and precipices of the Norwegian mountains, only he knew. He also got into hot water with his father, who was inclined to be strict, on some other accounts; not the least occasion being when he took a brand-new sewing-machine to pieces, just to find out how it worked!

He was sent to the High School in the city, a considerable walk. There was no love lost between the town boys and the scholars, and many an ambush and battle-royal, sometimes with sticks and other dangerous weapons, took place between them in the streets. Nansen usually managed to keep clear of these quarrels, being peaceable by nature; but when once he had been aroused, as by an act of cruelty to some weaker boy, or by a chance stone on the ankle which roused his ire, then let the other side beware! Here again the boy foreshadowed the man. Calm and good-natured he might be; but when once his blood was up he displayed all the reckless courage that marked the berserk Vikings from whom he was descended.

Life at Froen had many attractions for the Nansen boys, even during the long and severe winter, when the pines, bending beneath their burden of white, loomed mysteriously out of the clinging mists like ghostly Christmas-trees, and

when the forecourt was so deeply snow-covered that one had to spend hours in shovelling a passage from the door to the lane. What snowball fights there were, what glorious slides! not to mention the joyous game of "Follow-my-Leader" (although that leader as likely as not would trip on a concealed root and tumbled head over heels into the snow); or the early efforts to master those awkward wooden skis, which would persist in catching the ankle or getting in each other's way, until one ached with the labour of it. The last-named art had to be acquired early, for without skis it was well-nigh impossible to move far from one's home during the winter, over the uneven and deeply buried ground. Nansen himself began to learn it at the mature age of four; and we can picture him manfully trying to feather-stitch his way uphill with a crude pair of skis—"not even the same length", he declared scornfully, years afterwards; or, clad in warm woollen jersey and bright red or blue tasseled cap, following the others down the steep slopes, taking jumps in his stride, and not infrequently coming a cropper in consequence, only to pick himself up and rush on again with shouts of laughter. Truly, winter in Norway had its compensations. Thus it brought the thirteen cheerful days of Yule, when one's

elders relaxed and the taciturn, stern-faced men-folk even condescended to laugh and play; when—joy of joys!—presents arrived at Froen, done up in mysterious brown-paper parcels, with lots and lots of string; when grains of corn had to be solemnly carried out and sprinkled on the moss-grown roofs, so that the little birds also should enjoy a Christmas dinner; when the girls of one's acquaintance, red-cheeked and bright-eyed, with well-starched caps and their best aprons on, were gathered in and about the house, and there was lots of giggling, whispering and leg-pulling, forfeits, dances, and goodness knows what other fun; while from the neighbouring kitchen came the delicious smell of roasting meat and new-baked cakes, filling every young heart with anticipation and every young mouth with saliva. Outside, the world might be wrapped in snow, ice and mist, but within all was warm, gay and cheerful. These were the happiest days of one's life; days, indeed, upon which Nansen often cast a longing and regretful thought in the periods of stress and danger through which he passed afterwards.

Although he was an active boy, there were many occasions when outdoor life was paralysed. At such times, and when his mischievous fingers could be kept away from the family tool-chest, he

might have been seen deep in a book of travel or adventure. He loved to read about the old Norse rovers and pirates, of Olaf Tryggvason (who could walk round the ship upon the oars as his men rowed), of Thor's adventures in the enchanted city of giants, of the beautiful Brynhild, and all the other legends that the old minstrels or skalds had handed down. These creatures of the imagination made a deep and abiding impression upon him, for in his nature there ran a marked strain of the mystic and the Nature-worshipper. A little later, when he had mastered English (which educated Norwegians generally acquired), we find him lost in admiration of Sir John Franklin, who perished while trying to find the North-west Passage round Canada; still more deeply was the youth stirred by the heroic efforts of Rae, Ross, M'Clintock and the rest to solve the mystery of Franklin's fate. Good stuff this, the best possible for a healthy boy with manly tastes. Young Nansen little thought, when he sighed to emulate the feats of those stout old British mariners, that one day he would shake hands with the greatest of them, and that years afterwards he would follow his coffin, himself one of the most distinguished mourners!

But at this period of his life it was the forest which attracted him most. He tells us how, when

his mother took him to church on Sundays, his mind was often far from prayer-books or hymns, having strayed to the freedom and lonely charms of the woods; and although the forest, which lay at a walking distance of several hours from Froen, had been forbidden to the boys, the inevitable time came when they disregarded the rule and disappeared thither; mindless, as boys are, of their father's annoyance or their mother's alarm. When they returned home that night, tired and flushed, and grimly braced up for the expected hiding, the wise parents said nothing, and the culprits escaped. A few days later the chains were as wisely lifted; it is an admirable parent who knows when to set his son free. Thereafter the forest became Fridtjof's spiritual home. As soon as school was over each week-end in the summer or spring he bent his steps thither, for within those leafy depths not only were fish to be caught, animals to be trapped, rivers to be swum, but a vast, silent green wilderness, steeped in the strong smell of the pines, with a soft bed of pine needles underfoot, great mossy stones scattered round like the relics of some giant's play, and all the elves, pixies, and other fairy tenants with which the young imagination loves to people such spots. As years slipped away, and his spells of liberty were

enlarged, he sometimes spent weeks alone in the forest, communing with himself like the Red Indians of old; it was "the sole confidant of my childhood days", he wrote nearly forty years afterwards. The long, rough, solitary walk up to the hills from Froen, the subtle pleasure of doing things for oneself—of cooking one's own dinner in the hot embers of a wood fire, having first had to catch that dinner in the clear, cold mountain stream—made him not only self-reliant and resourceful beyond other youths, but even contemptuous of luxury and quite Spartan in his habits. Such trifles as dainty food or any other bed than the turf or bracken which Nature provided free, troubled him little if at all. He says: "I disliked having any equipment for my expeditions. I managed with a crust of bread and broiled my fish on the embers. I loved to live like Robinson Crusoe up there in the wilderness." How he would have stared to see the equipment of a modern hiker, out for the week-end!

Many a strenuous interlude was spent in this fashion, sometimes alone, at others with his brother or an elder relative, walking, fishing, swimming, and wandering about in the forest, until they returned home exhausted, and really in no condition for the ensuing week's school; but

Nansen had always an immense fund of surplus energy which had to be worked off somehow. Even more vigorous were their hare-hunting trips, one of which lasted thirteen days on end.

This hardy life bred in him a contempt for natural dangers which led inevitably to his challenging those dangers and thereby called out every ounce of his resourcefulness in order to overcome them; it was all admirable though unconscious training for his future career. If two courses lay open to him he habitually chose the more difficult, for he could see no credit in doing easy things. Of course, such a mutinous attitude towards Nature led him into some serious scrapes, and he afterwards called it his "Master Irresponsible" breaking out; but whatever difficulty he found himself in, he generally found some way of surmounting it. Once a dare-devil act nearly cost him his life. When he was seventeen he and his brother were climbing the Svartdal peak, a great precipitous mass which rises from a glacier-covered slope not very far from Bergen; the snow ran down to the edge of a precipice, whence there was a sheer drop to a valley far beneath. His brother, who was feeling giddy, had the assistance of Fridtjof's alpenstock; but our hero, who was apparently overstriding in his casual way,

ventured on to the treacherous slope without any support, slipped, and in an instant was sliding down towards eternity. "He turned pale, but dug his heels and nails into the ice and stopped in the nick of time"; having escaped destruction with the loss of nothing more serious than the seat of his trousers.

Besides these more or less solitary excursions, young Nansen mixed wholeheartedly in sports of all kinds, especially the winter games, wherein his tall, slender, muscular frame gave him a great advantage. He seemed, indeed, to be living the life proclaimed by the old Norse king, Harald the Hardy:

"Eight feats I ken : the sportive game,
The war array, the fabrile art ;
With fearless breast the waves I stem ;
I press the steed ; I cast the dart ;
O'er ice on slippery skates I glide ;
My dexterous oar defies the tide."

He was a strong and fearless swimmer, and he loved to row a boat among the islands in the fjord; but, most of all, the ice sports attracted his attention, and the competitive spirit was roused in him to the highest pitch by this national sport. At seventeen he won the long-distance skating championship of Norway, and at eighteen he broke

the world's one-mile skating record. To become a first class skier was another ambition, but this took longer to accomplish.

We have seen how he had been schooled in the use of skis from the age of four, and he could work his way uphill over rough country, or glide fearlessly down the slopes and over small cliffs, with the best of his companions; but the more difficult feats, such as the spectacular jumps over a steep edge upon a glassy and down-sloping run eighty or ninety feet away were naturally at first beyond him. Nevertheless, when he once went with some other boys to Huseby Hill, about four miles from his home (where annual competitions were held at that time), and saw others taking the dangerous jump in fine style, the temptation to try himself was too great to be resisted; and despite the warnings of his companions he climbed to the top, and letting himself go (on the principle, which he so often applied later in life, of "neck or nothing") was soon irretrievably committed. "I came," he says, "at a fearful speed to the jump, sailed for what seemed a long time in space, and ran my snowshoes deep into a drift." Alas, he had had them turned down at too high an angle, so that they dug in instead of gliding with him down the slope. Of course the shoes stuck fast,

while Nansen, who was jerked clear of them by the shock, catapulted through the air and landed head first in the snow, being buried up to the middle. After being hauled out he had to endure the unsympathetic jeers of the spectators, but he was never to be deterred by criticism. He soon found opportunities of trying again, and eventually he won a prize for this very jump; but then, having attained the object for which he had striven, he did a very curious, if not unique thing: he refused the prize. For after his own performance he had noticed how very much better the peasants of southern Norway carried themselves on their skis, moving without the help of a staff, and trusting to their natural sense of balance and the strength of their muscles alone; this gave them an easy grace which the possessor of a stick could never hope to equal. "I saw that this was the only proper way," he said, long after, "and until I had mastered it I would not have any prize." Such strength of character is rare indeed. Master the skis he did, and in later years he frequently won the international cross-country ski race; but he never approached the extraordinary records attained by the northern Lapps.

All this sport, with its enjoyable tramping, fishing, swimming, skating and skiing, was good

enough training for the body; it taught him self-reliance, calmness under difficulties, and a contempt for danger. But a less attractive type of learning had to be mastered too. Even as a boy he had a strong leaning towards physics, chemistry and mathematics, so long as he could be kept at them, and when he left the High School he carried away a first-class certificate in those subjects. At the university he was to study geology and zoology, but there, for a long while, his affairs did not prosper. He was only nineteen; he had made a name for himself in sport and was too full of the zest for outdoor life to settle down to the rigid study which alone can bring results worth while. Nevertheless, this daily grind had to be gone through, and a career chosen, and despite much mental rebellion, Nansen faced the distasteful fact—as he did most others—manfully and honestly. He chose zoology for a profession, without at that date having the least idea whither it would lead him; but the Norwegian fisheries had lately been attracting much scientific attention, through an expedition which had garnered a rich harvest of new facts in the wide Norwegian Sea. He worked under some of the leaders in that enterprise and he must have caught some trace of their enthusiasm and interest.

There was, indeed, much in the scientific study of the ocean which would attract such a sea-loving youth. Its mysterious currents, its boundless power and might, the strange living things which were constantly being hauled out of it, above all, the *reasons* for its innumerable changes of temperature, saltness, life-forms and so on—all of which called him with the lure of the unknown—acted upon him like an irresistible loadstone for the rest of his life.

Be that as it may, here at last Fridtjof Nansen found his true calling; but the strange route by which he arrived at it must be left to the next chapter.

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CHAPTER II

The Cruise of the "Viking"

Nansen was now in his twenty-first year, a splendid specimen of health and vigour, six feet high, amazingly strong, with keen, challenging eyes, and all the grace of a trained athlete. Although study had lain but lightly on his shoulders hitherto, yet he had learned a great deal. But some outlet for his superabundant energy had to be found apart from poring over books or experiments in a classroom, and Professor Robert Collett, who had himself been connected with the deep-sea researches mentioned above, suggested that the young man could not have a better practical training in zoology than to join a sealer. The prospect of studying the valuable fur seals in their native home, the certainty of good sport, and the opportunities of practical work in cutting up and dissection, made Nansen fairly jump at the idea, the more so as he already held the bold, bluff-mannered sealing skippers to be models of men. He at once sought for a ship. To this fortunate

piece of advice most of his subsequent career before the Great War can be traced; so much depends upon a word in season!

Learning that Axel Krefting, the master of the barque *Viking*, might take him, Nansen at once rushed off to interview him. Krefting was a burly, handsome man in the early thirties, who had himself become a skipper at twenty; he liked the appearance and felt the singular charm of the young man and agreed to take him as a passenger. Matters were soon settled, the last adieux paid, and then, 11th March, 1882, after Nansen had taken a few things aboard, the ship slowly steamed out of Arendal, a little port 150 miles from Christiania, into the stormy North Sea. At last he was bound for the frozen wilderness into which his imagination had so often roamed. Nansen, leaning upon the bulwarks, and regarding the long line of skerries and wooded islets which he knew so well, and in the background the mountains of his beloved Norway, still shrouded in snow and mist, had qualms of homesickness, but they were soon dispelled by sickness of another kind, when the wind filled the *Viking's* sails and she began to pitch and roll in the heavy seas; nor did he get his sea-legs till a week afterwards, although constantly struggling against the infirmity.

The *Viking* was a bark-rigged wooden sealing ship of 620 tons, with an auxiliary engine and a crew of sixty. For the expected encounters with the ice she was protected by a number of iron bands round the bows, both above and below the water-line; behind these was almost six feet of solid timber, and the hull had been covered by a double sheath of pine and greenheart, the better to resist the cruel stabs and pressures to which she would almost certainly be subjected. There were two little cabins aft, on the half-deck, which were occupied by the captain and Nansen respectively.

The first object of the cruise was to hunt young Greenland seals. These little creatures, which are coated in wool, are born on the floating ice-sheets near Jan Mayen towards the end of March; and there they sometimes lie in countless thousands, but the herds are never to be found at the same spot two years in succession. During their first fortnight of life the young seals lie helplessly upon the ice, being tended by the mothers; after that they take to the water and are no longer easy to capture. It was therefore imperative for the ship to be at the breeding grounds in good time, and as the *Viking* was several days behind the rest of the fleet *Krefting* crowded on both sail and

steam to help her northwards towards the ice.

They had not gone far before they met an abandoned wreck, the sight of which, with an oar lashed to the mizzen-mast as a signal of distress, made a strong impression on the *Viking's* passenger.

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Soon the wind became so strong that the long Atlantic rollers looked menacing indeed as they swept upon the ship and made her roll like a crazy thing; but the captain would not abate an inch of sail until a more than usually fierce gust did it for him by snapping the main yard like a match-stick. While the crew, clad in thigh-boots and oilskins, toiled at splicing the broken yard the fury of the storm increased. On the fourth day out it was blowing a full gale, and great bluish-green mountains of water dashed across the decks. Despite his sickness Nansen was out and watching it, for there is something very grand and awe-inspiring about a storm at sea, and he was well enough to notice how the stormy petrels which pursued them untiringly rose and fell in their flight with the waves, always hovering at about the same height above the water. At last even Krefting was forced to shorten sail, but they still scudded merrily along, dipping into the waves and shipping a sea every now and then. As Nansen stood beside

him on the half-deck that night, watching the storm, the captain suddenly shouted, "Look out!" Nansen caught a glimpse of a dark mass above him and clutched the shrouds just as a great wave broke over the deck and swept him off his feet. It poured over the skylight towards the wheel, but not more quickly than Krefting's order to the steersman, "Let go the wheel!" for if the man had attempted to hang on at that instant the shock might have jerked it out of his hands and knocked him senseless. For the young scientist, all this was a rude initiation to Neptune's realm, but he soon found a sense of enjoyment in it, heightened perhaps by the danger. By the end of a week the internal symptoms had gone, and thereafter he was to be seen wandering with great strides about the ship, talking to the crew, yarning with the captain, or sitting in his little cabin, with a pipe of Dutch tobacco between his teeth and an adventure story-book in his hands.

As the weather improved, life on board became easy, for most of the crew had nothing to do until the seals appeared. Krefting, however, found all sorts of odd jobs to keep them from idleness, such as making mats and fenders for the ship, rigging up blocks, &c.

The following evening they sighted the ice. It

slipped past them in half-drowned blocks, sheet-like, and ghostly white in the gloom. Soon there were more pieces, and now and again one caught the ship, shaking her violently, while the sky to the north was light from the reflected glare of the ice-fields. From the same quarter came the confused sound of floe grinding against floe, as they collided incessantly in the ocean swell. Next morning, 19th March, Nansen saw for the first time a spectacle with which in later years he was to become only too familiar: the sea covered with a sheet of ice, in great cakes or floes, and glittering in the sun so brilliantly that he had to shade his eyes. Presently he noticed that the sheets were split up by cracks, lanes and pools, through which a ship could perhaps be driven, and as the floes were only about two feet thick the *Viking* was run straight at the most likely channels, rising above any obstructing points and crushing them by sheer weight; the brash crackling, grinding and moaning as it slipped astern. Overhead in the pale sky beautiful white ivory gulls flew round the ship; otherwise the place was a dead fairyland, bereft of all living things.

This day the crow's nest was fastened to the maintop. It would become the captain's home during much of the next few months. It comprised

a canvas-covered tube about five feet high, just large enough to hold two men, with a seat for the look-out and a rail upon which he could lean his telescope; one reached it by climbing a Jacob's ladder and pushing up a trap-door in the floor, itself a sufficiently dizzy experience for a novice at more than 100 feet above the swaying deck. From this eyrie, which gave a view of about twelve miles round, the captain had to guide his ship among the floes, and here he sat watching incessantly for the smoke or rigging of other ships and for the dark patches on the ice that betokened seals. Of course Nansen went up there too. He soon acquired a great liking for it, and he once lived out a storm up there, although the main-mast looked as if it would tumble overboard at any moment.

As the Greenland seals were protected by international law until after the 3rd April each year, it was the object of every sealer to be on the scene before that date, if possible. But not only did the seals continually change their quarters for breeding; the ice itself also varied enormously in extent and locality from year to year, so that looking for seals along the ice-edge in constant mists, and sometimes with the ship's sides knocking ominously against the floes, was a pure speculation.

Each ship, too, watched for all the others, lest any of them should gain an advantage, and to deceive each other if a breeding ground were found they would deliberately sail away from the seals, hoping to steal back later unobserved.

For weeks they cruised persistently along the edge of the ice, occasionally penetrating into the pack, but without success. The first ship they sighted was the *Jason*, Captain Jacobsen, who came aboard. Six years later the same ship and the same captain took Nansen westwards on his memorable expedition for the first crossing of Greenland.

One evening (20th March) a storm suddenly burst upon them when they were close to the ice—a dangerous predicament, because to be battered broadside-on against the surging and enormous floes was little less deadly than striking upon rocks on a lee shore. But Krefting, whose daring equalled his skill, instantly ordered the ship to be driven straight into the ice, amidst the tumultuous mass of heaving and groaning blocks. At one instant they nearly fouled a huge ice-mound: "Hard aport!" They missed it, only to turn straight into a towering sea, which came aboard, swept the decks and smashed down the bulwarks. Nevertheless, they pressed on until

they were within the ice, when the din suddenly ceased; all the commotion had now passed astern, and there they lay as calmly as if in harbour, surrounded by the ice, and with only the howl of the disappointed gale in their rigging. The expedient had been a desperate one, but it had succeeded.

Presently several other ships were sighted, some of which had been in the vicinity for days. Skinning-knives and sharpening-steels were now served out to the crew (all of whom had a share in the profits), but still there were no seals, except for a few sleek swimmers in the water. (It must be understood that although the sea was covered with huge sheets of ice, these floes were always in motion, now opening and disclosing deep-blue lanes of water, now grinding together again and throwing up pressure ridges or hummocks ten to twenty feet high, where the opposed edges struggled for the mastery.)

Among the fleet was the *Vega*, which, only three years earlier, under the celebrated Nordenskiöld, had circumnavigated the Old World for the first time in history; strange fancies may have passed through the head of the *Viking's* passenger as he boarded this famous ship with Krefting and received the hospitality of her cheery skipper.

Whenever the sealers met, the captains held these conferences and broke a bottle of spirits; Nansen, who was present at most of the discussions, watched everything closely and silently, meanwhile learning the difficult art of managing men.

Nansen now began to perplex the seamen by his scientific operations. Whenever the ship was stopped he would sink a thermometer to various levels in the sea, thereby discovering the remarkable fact that between the cold sea below and the very cold surface layer a third layer was sandwiched, which was relatively warm; this was the last relic of the Gulf Stream drift, making its way north under the fresher water that was pouring out of the polar basin. He also dragged nets in the sea, so as to catch the minute brown plants called Diatoms and the abundant little "shrimps" called Oarfeet, upon both of which fishes feed. Even thus early he displayed a readiness at making apparatus out of any odd materials, which spoke well for his resourcefulness and ingenuity.

A regular fleet had now assembled, but still there was nothing for them to catch, and as the 3rd April drew near, and they all looked like being marooned in the ice, it was agreed that the powerful *Viking*, with the others in support, should force a

passage out to the open sea. They began by rolling the ship, as many sailors as possible running across the deck from side to side, so as to roll her and break away the icy "stocks" in which she lay. Then steam was raised, and the proud *Viking* steamed straight at the ice, ramming it bodily and forcing the floes apart as she gradually opened a crack. This did the ship no good, of course, but it set her free, and by the 2nd April they were in open water again, the rest of the vessels being still beset.

Krefting now explored westwards along the ice-edge, in fog and frost. Cheerless north-west winds moaned across the frozen wilderness; there were no seals. It was the 10th April before they made their first catch and that a small one; yet they now encountered hundreds of seals in the water, where the animals were perfectly safe.

While on the ice, Greenland seals are not easy to approach. They love to lie there dozing and sunning themselves, but they have sentries out, who look up suspiciously every now and then, so that an approaching boat must be instantly stopped until the sentinels sink down again, otherwise the whole herd would slip away into the water. The boat's crew comprised four or five oarsmen, with a leader armed with a rifle, who stood in the bows

and directed the line of approach; the others had knives hung by cords around their waists, and their duty was to skin the seals which the leader shot. They also clubbed the helpless young seals to death by means of long bars with spiked heads, a brutal business, that is necessitated by men's greed and women's vanity; for although the seal consumes a great many fish he is otherwise a harmless and even likeable creature. When the boat has approached as close as possible to the dark spots on the ice a sharp order pulls her up, and the man in the bow, taking careful aim—no easy matter in a craft which is bobbing up and down—neatly shoots the seal dead through the head or neck; but should he merely wound it his labour will have been wasted, for the seal will dive into the sea and all the rest will follow it. Nansen, who was an extremely good shot, was permitted after a short probation to command a boat, and his total nearly always ranked high in the day's captures, but still the *Viking's* entire catch was very poor indeed. On the 25th April, however, they had a shock, for they met six of the ships that had been frozen in, and which were laden with sealskins and blubber to the bulwarks. As luck would have it, their detention had proved to be their salvation, for seals soon afterwards

appeared on the frozen surface in vast numbers and between them the various crews had secured about 60,000 skins, a record number. The *Viking*, on the other hand, could boast only a few hundreds, so great is the uncertainty of this fishery.

After this bitter disappointment Krefting sailed north once more, catching a few seals from day to day; but his chance had now gone, and he decided to fall back on every northern sealer's second string, by going west to Greenland; there he would be sure to find Bladdernose Seals, which are less valuable but still important. The Bladdernose is a large animal, about eight feet long; it has a loose elastic hood above its snout which when angry it expands with air. Unlike the Greenland seals, it does not live in herds, but in small families scattered over a great extent of ice. The method of hunting it was quite different also. The boats must be kept in sight, for so long as it could see them it did not recognize any danger, whereas their sudden appearance would drive it into the sea. To hunt it requires superior skill and special knowledge of the ice, matters in which Krefting's reputation stood high.

We have already said that Nansen was a good shot. Despite the eccentricities of a moving boat,

he could put a bullet through a seal's brain as neatly as the skipper himself; and it is probable that, like most young men under similar circumstances, he was proud of his marksmanship. But one day he met his master in one of the crew, named Hans. A rifle cartridge was stood up in the forecabin, and he was challenged by Hans to hit it from the saloon, the bet being $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. of tobacco. Nansen accepted at once, but to his own amazement and the assembled crew's delight he missed it time after time, until he had lost a whole pound of tobacco. The captain then tried with the same rifle and he too missed several times. Nansen now discovered that the sight of the rifle had been (no doubt purposely) bent aside. He straightened it and promptly put three bullets through the target in succession, "piercing and repiercing the same hole until the thing barely hung together. Hans would not accept another bet!"

He got on well with the crew, and he became particularly adept at the nasty but necessary work of cutting the dead animals open and skinning them. The ship during these days resembled a shambles, what with the piles of sealskins, the heaps of blubber, and the blood and mess everywhere; the filthy work of freeing the skins from flesh and blubber was also done on deck, and the

skins were afterwards packed in the hold in curing bins.

One great attraction of such a voyage as this is that you never know what you are going to encounter next. On the 12th May, in a dead calm sea, the *Viking* ran into a school of bottle-nosed whales. These creatures were not hunted at that date, and although the captain and Nansen blazed away at them with express rifles they might as well have peppered them with peashooters, so little impression was made. Then the captain, out of sheer curiosity, had a boat lowered and rowed out to the monsters, until they could almost touch two or three of them with the oars. Up till now they had lain quiet, but "suddenly," says Nansen, "they lifted their tails in the air, brought them down with a whack that drenched the boat with spray, and disappeared," only to come up again a few minutes later, swimming round and round the boat in the greatest curiosity.

The 17th May was Independence Day, celebrated everywhere by Norwegians with much ceremony; we shall hear a great deal more about this date later. High festival was held on board the *Viking*. The day was given over to games and sports, of which the most popular was leg-hooking. In this two opponents lie down on their backs

side by side, but facing in opposite directions; each links his right arm through the other's, and then, raising his right leg, endeavours to throw his opponent over. Nansen joined in the fun, and to his own surprise overthrew the entire crew, one after another. Finally the captain agreed to try. He was an extremely powerful man, but at the first essay Nansen sent him spinning along the deck like a ball. Krefting, nothing dismayed, asked for a second try. This time he cunningly stuck his left foot through a ring-bolt, and try as he might Nansen could not budge him; but at last the pressure became so great that the captain had to yell for mercy.

They then sailed down to Iceland, passing a great many bottle-nosed whales, and anchored off the rugged, fog-bound and desolate southern coast. Here a day was spent in catching so many cod and halibut—one of the halibut alone weighed 156 lb.—that for days afterwards most of the crew were to be found in the galley, frying, boiling, and eating this delicious food. Meanwhile, Krefting took Nansen ashore for a walk over the rugged lava fields and the damp, soft places where boiling springs burst through; took tea with a hospitable lighthouse keeper; and then returned aboard and sailed for Greenland and the bladdernoses.

Off Greenland the ice was very different from anything that Nansen had seen hitherto, the floes being old, dirty, thick, and marked by tremendous pressure ridges. Nansen saw that they must have come from the Polar Basin, that mysterious unknown northern wilderness into which men had been trying to penetrate for centuries, but in vain; and yet the ice had floated out of it, and had even brought great logs of driftwood from the Siberian rivers. These facts impressed him greatly, but for the present their application to exploring work eluded him.

Working a way through the lanes in this ice was no easy task, and the statesmen, as they obeyed the repeated commands and counter-commands from aloft, were drenched in sweat, despite the cold. Knives were sharpened once more and rifles cleaned; Krefting sat constantly in the crow's nest; and every one anxiously awaited his order, "Turn out for a fall!", the signal that the hunt was up. On that command the ship would wake to life; feverish activity and restlessness would pervade everybody; the smell of cooking came from the galley, where a sound meal was prepared for all (it being by no means certain when they would get their next); the gunners received their arms; and the boats were

stored each with a keg of beer and rations of hard rye biscuit and salt pork—"delicious fare," remarked Nansen, after the ardour and exhaustion of a long chase, for nothing whets the appetite like hard physical work.

The passenger, who was now rated among the best gunners on board, was placed in command of one of the largest of the ship's ten boats, with a crew of five—a signal distinction which he speedily justified. At each hunt the boats were sent out according to a regular plan of campaign, each boat having its own flag and receiving separate instructions from the captain, who directed its movements from the ship; at his signal all had to return. In addition to watching the seals and sealers, he had to be constantly mindful of the mist, which comes on without warning; for boats' crews had been lost from this cause more than once and their lives had been in the gravest peril. The hunt also had occasional dangers of its own, for the male seals, when angry, were by no means feeble enemies. Once, while Nansen's crew were rowing through a channel and he himself was looking ahead for the route, he heard a shout, "Hi, look out for yourself!" and there in the water beside him was the head of an infuriated bladdernose, with hood inflated, and clearly

meaning mischief. It made straight at him. He snatched up his rifle, but in the hurry the shot miscarried. The seal sprang upon the gunwale and bit at him, but missed. He then seized a club with which to strike it down, but it had already gone; a moment later it came up on the other side and renewed the attack. Then he shot it at last, only to lose the prize after all, for it sank.

Bladdernose seals were now caught daily in hundreds; a little later three days' work yielded 1100 skins, so that the voyage was a partial success after all. The bodies were skinned on the ice and the flesh flung aside, and numbers of Greenland sharks soon assembled to enjoy this cheap and easy meal. They were big, ugly-looking brutes, up to twenty feet long, with hideous gaping mouths fringed by terrible teeth, but were utterly sluggish and stupid. As the liver was valuable for its yield of train-oil, Nansen collected a gang of men, who went out on the ice armed with seal clubs, spiked the sharks as they lay like logs in the water, and hauled them up; so dull were the great fish that if the hook slipped all that one had to do was to push the shark into a more convenient position and hook it up again! In a single day and night about fifty were caught, making a valuable addition

to the ship's cargo. One of these monsters had swallowed a seal whole; another had gulped down a halibut weighing half a hundredweight and a big codfish in addition.

The captain shot a polar bear or two, a feat which Nansen was thirsting to emulate; but he had to wait until the end of June for an opportunity, by which time the ship had become frozen into the ice and all that they could do was to drift whither the floes drifted, waiting for a chance to get free again. The weather became cold, raw, and almost always misty; and the crew were inclined to be despondent, especially when Krefting and Nansen declared that if the ship were lost they could still make their way across the ice to the desert coast of Greenland and found a colony there! It was during these idle days that Nansen got his chance to hunt a bear. While he lay asleep the second mate woke him up with the news that a bear was outside. Out he turned in an instant, to find the bear nosing around and occasionally taking a sly glance at the ship. A hurried shot by one of the gunners, which missed, drove him away; so they fried some pork on the deck and the delicious odour soon brought the bear back again. Nansen sprang down on the ice and advanced cautiously; but the bear had

seen him, and it climbed a hummock the better to view this audacious invader; for polar bears are usually quite fearless, although wary and cunning. Nansen aimed just behind the shoulder and pulled the trigger, but the cartridge jammed; he broke his nails in trying to loosen it, but at last out it came and in went a second. Meanwhile, the bear, scenting a good meal in Nansen, had been approaching by degrees behind the hummocks. This time he aimed at the chest, and there was no misfire. The animal roared with pain, bit at the wound, and rolled over, but struggled up again and made off. Another bullet caught it in the hind quarter. It roared again, but went off faster than ever, Nansen pursuing it as quickly as he could run, from floe to floe, regardless of the mist and the fact that the ship was out of sight. Finally it plunged into the water between two floes, and as it clambered up on the far side he shot it dead. The fog was now so thick that he could not find his way back; but fortunately he had been followed from the ship, for Krefting watched over him with the utmost care; and so his first bearskin was taken back in triumph to the *Viking*.

From this time onwards he was admitted to many exciting bear hunts, and he acquired quite

a reputation for his fearlessness and persistence in chasing the great animals through slush and water, up among the hummocks or down on the level ice, often swimming after the bears like a seal, tireless and undaunted; for he had a wild Viking strain that nothing could assuage when once his blood was up, although at normal times a calm and peaceful-minded man.

Once, this hunting fever led him into the gravest danger. He was chasing a bear among the mounds of broken ice and had just cleared a wide lane by the simple expedient of jumping over it, when the whole edge of the floe upon which he had landed broke away, and he fell with a splash into the water. His first thought was for his rifle; he flung it on the ice and clambered up after it. The bear had vanished, but as he popped his head above a hummock he came face to face with it. Nansen levelled his rifle instantly, but the bear plunged into the water in a trice, the bullet only striking its hind quarter as it disappeared. He ran to the edge, and finding that the bear was struggling down the middle of the lane he sprang upon one of two floating pieces of ice, with the idea of crossing to the next floe and heading it off; but the ice only just bore him, and while he was balancing himself in preparation for a jump, up

rose the huge head of the bear beside him. It had changed its tactics and was now on the offensive. "It heaved itself up on the other piece of ice; and now it was touch and go with me. I managed to steady myself sufficiently to level the rifle and fired right into its chest, the smoke blackening all the surrounding fur. It rolled off the piece of ice . . . and showed signs of sinking. I held it up by one ear, and very soon it was dead."

The captain and one of the crew, who had been anxiously watching the chase, now came up, and between them they hauled the bear up on the ice, with the help of Nansen's belt. It was one of the largest bears they ever secured.

Still the ship remained fast, slowly drifting along the wild Greenland coast; where the savage cliffs were crowned by snow-clad peaks and mystery and adventure beckoned from the white line of the huge ice-cap behind. Practically nothing was known about it, and Nansen wanted to make an excursion across the floes to the shore; but Krefting wisely refused permission—how wisely, we shall see better in a later chapter. So the mists rolled up and shut out from view that traveller's paradise, an unexplored country; and the eager Nansen, watching it from the crow's nest, had to let the chance go by.

He did make one excursion, however, by crossing to a large berg which lay aground, and collecting some of the earth and stones from it; even these slight indications of the nature of the country had some scientific interest, where all was unknown.

The crew of the *Viking*, who knew how stout sealers had been remorselessly destroyed by the cruel ice pressure, and how their crews had, after terrible hardships and suffering, made their way to that very Greenland coast and perished there of hunger, were not at all interested in these trips and projects; the only rocks they wished to see were the rocks of Norway! They were also puzzled by the young scientist's habits, his net-dragging, temperature-recording, and all his other unfamiliar work. One of them asked the captain, "What's he going to be, that there Nansen?" "A naturalist," replied Krefting. This was beyond the man's comprehension; there was no money, he thought, to be made out of natural history, nor was he far wrong in that respect. He decided therefore that the energetic young passenger would make "a good vet, because he was a rare hand at cutting up animals". Unfortunately for this prophecy Nansen had other ideas; money is not everything, but only a means of making life easy.

And now at last the day came when they were to be freed from the irksome stillness and monotony of life among the floes. They drifted rapidly southwards, where the ice must open. Steam was raised, and on the 17th July they cleared the ice edge, after an imprisonment of three weeks. Pleasant it was to sail on the bright blue sea again, to feel once more the motion of the ship, and to hear the sails straining under the wind. The course was set for home, and Nansen's first taste of wild life in the Arctic was over. It had been enjoyable, but like a half-emptied cup of water to a thirsty man; he was filled with the desire to drink more deeply, but many a storm was to rage over the Norwegian mountains, and many a cargo to be landed on Christiania's quays, before that wish was realized.

CHAPTER III

Curator Nansen

Upon his return to Norway, Nansen was naturally full of the remarkable things which he had seen in the Arctic. It was then still very largely an unknown world, and the possibilities for a determined explorer were immense. Especially was he attracted by the East Greenland coast, and the desire to tread that lonely strand, to ascend its fjords and collect its rocks, to study its bird life and make excursions upon the inland ice-cap, was keen within him; but he was still only a student of one-and-twenty, and there was plenty of time for such things later. His father expected him to continue his studies and qualify for a degree.

At this juncture Professor Collett again became Nansen's good genius; for upon hearing that his friend, Dr. Danielssen, Director of the Bergen Museum, required a new assistant, he mentioned Nansen's name, and the young scientist was offered the post. After a little hesitation Nansen accepted.

He went to Bergen as Curator of Zoology, and there he remained on and off for the next six years. His chief was a highly cultured old gentleman of strong personality, for whom he soon acquired a deep respect and even affection. He began to see that there was a great deal more in zoology than shooting seals through the brain and skinning bears; and in addition to the care of the museum specimens, and their presentation for exhibition, he entered upon a course of detailed study, with microscope and scalpel, which presently brought him distinction. "For six years," he said long afterwards, "I lived in a microscope." This was not strictly accurate, but it represents the main course of his life at that period.

The young working biologist has an immense amount to learn; and as he struggles with masses of material, and finds his valuable hours used up with no more tangible result (at first sight) than a number of notebooks and a pile of microscopic slides, he is apt to get impatient, especially if he has the eager, almost fiercely active temper of a Fridtjof Nansen. The climate, too, made the enforced inaction still more tedious to the young curator; for although Bergen is most beautifully situated at the foot of noble hills, with the grandest mountains in Norway only a short distance away,

it has a heavy rainfall and frequent mists, both of which were distasteful to one who had spent his life in the drier air of Christiania. He had been there only a year when he learned how Norden-skiold (on whose ship, the *Vega*, he himself had stood) had made a notable journey to the interior of Greenland, accompanied by Lapps on ski, who covered remarkable distances. The idea at once seized Nansen, "Here is the way to cross Greenland; take a party of skiers to the east coast and cross the ice-cap on skis!" He wrote to his father, "I feel a sneaking longing to break loose every time I hear of such adventures". But he was sufficiently self-disciplined to resist such impulses for the present, until his student course was finished; and in the same spirit he refused a chance to go to America two months afterwards. Eighteen months later Baldur Nansen died, secure in the thought that his younger son, wild and mad though he might be thought by many people, was well on the road to distinction. Meanwhile, that son had set men talking once more, by a foolhardy winter trip on skis across the mountains from Bergen to Huseby, simply to take part in a ski-jumping contest (Jan., 1884). After the meeting, he accomplished the remarkable feat of marching back for $16\frac{1}{2}$ hours on end,

and then spending a night in the snow, with no better covering than a sweater, and no other warmth than that of his faithful dog. Such natures as this are not to be judged by ordinary standards, but "gang their ain gait" through the world.

The Bergen curator was deeply interested in questions of nervous structure—how nerves work, and why, how they are built, and so on. In 1885 he published a paper on the subject, "The Minute Structure of the Central Nervous System," which attracted attention and won him a gold medal. In order to prosecute his researches, he obtained permission to visit Italy, firstly to see Professor Golgi, one of the greatest authorities on this subject, who taught at Pavia; and then to study at the great Marine Zoological Station at Naples. To help with the cost, he took his medal in copper, setting the value of the gold against his travelling expenses. At Naples he found himself in very congenial surroundings; for it had all the advantages of Bergen with none of its bad climate. The Station itself was then the most celebrated in Europe. It had been founded about a dozen years earlier by the enterprise of a German naturalist, Dr. Anton Dohrn, who sought to provide, not only an aquarium—where the public

could see such curiosities as living cuttlefishes, corals, and so forth—but also a working laboratory, at which students from all countries could have space on payment of a small fee; outside was the glorious bay, with the aquarium's own yacht and other craft, enveloped in the sunny atmosphere of southern Italy. Nansen studied here for seven weeks (April to June, 1886); and during free hours he had the advantage of conversation with the amiable Dohrn himself and his able band of assistants, besides the society of several other foreign naturalists, who were working there at the time. Such contacts quicken one's mind and broaden one's views. Nansen went back to Norway with a project for establishing a similar station at Bergen, but he was in advance of his time; it was not until 1894 that such a station was established, although its value in a country which draws an immense revenue from fisheries is beyond all question.

Two more years of work and study followed. He obtained his Doctorate, and it seemed now as if he would follow the normal history of scientists, by advancing from one tutorial post to another, until he grew too old to desire a change any longer; but Nansen, who was a law unto himself, had all this while been nourishing quite different

ideas. He read up the history of Greenland. He studied all that was known about its coasts, its mysterious interior, its eskimo inhabitants, and the efforts that had been made to penetrate into its appalling frozen heart. Then at last, in the autumn of 1887, he put forward a plan for crossing Greenland from coast to coast, which was sufficiently novel for its author to be called a lunatic and a potential suicide. Nothing stimulates some people so much as opposition; and from the moment when the newspapers poured ridicule on Nansen's project, and even his best friends called it foolhardy, it was perfectly certain that the project would become a fact.

CHAPTER IV

The First Crossing of Greenland

The plan of the expedition which had aroused such a storm of hostile criticism was simply this. A small party of expert skiers would sail as near to the East Greenland coast as possible, and would then be deposited on the floating ice with their boats and sledges. They would force a way somehow across the floes to the shore. They would then climb *somehow* up to ice-cap which was believed to cover the whole of the interior. Next they would *somehow* cross this ice-cap, and *somehow* would get down to the Danish settlements on the west coast. To the doubters there was a great deal too much "somehow" about all this; it savoured of a young man's enthusiasm, with none of that prudent thought for adverse circumstances which should rule a man's conduct when he is responsible for the lives of a party. As a fact, it was nothing of the kind; all that was requisite, apart from thorough organization beforehand, was the determination to succeed;

and Nansen had fully provided this incentive by burning his boats beforehand, for it was pretty clear to everyone from the start that if he failed to land after leaving the ship, or if, having landed, he failed to cross the inland ice, there could be no return. It was neck or nothing, the west coast of Greenland or a frozen grave in the wilderness, for all of them.

The cost of the journey would not be very great; but in order to give the expedition a national character, Nansen applied to the Storting for a grant of £275. Although supported by the University Council, this application was refused, and someone asked unkindly why they should vote him money to commit suicide in Greenland. The money was then offered by a generous Dane, Augustin Gamel, who had already financed one expedition; and Nansen gratefully accepted. In England his plan, which was published in Jan., 1888, did not arouse much criticism; but it was otherwise in Norway, where articles were written which, in Nansen's own words, showed an utter lack of understanding of the true conditions. Despite this hostility, more than forty people applied to go.

Nansen, who (however venturesome his projects might appear) never left anything to chance,

went to Sweden in order to learn from Nordenskiöld at first hand what the inland ice was like. He had to apply to the distinguished geologist, Brögger, for an introduction, and Brögger's account of his first meeting with Nansen is admirable. "Although his manner was just the same all the time—calm, straightforward, perhaps even a little awkward—yet it seemed as if he grew with every word. This plan, which a moment ago I had regarded as an utterly crazy idea, became in the course of the one conversation the most natural thing in the world. The conviction possessed me all of a sudden: he will do this thing as surely as we are here and talking about it."

Nordenskiöld was not attracted by the proposal, but generously gave the young explorer all the help he could. He himself believed that the inland ice did not cover the whole country, and that unknown obstacles might arise after the party was irretrievably committed; but previous explorations threw no light on that question. Edward Whymper, the famous conqueror of the Matterhorn, had got up to the ice in 1867; Nordenskiöld had been inland twice; and only two years before (1886), Lieut. Peary of the U.S. Navy, had made a summer journey inland for

100 miles, reaching a height of 7500 feet in the frozen wilderness. All these attempts had been made from the west; the explorers, if unsuccessful, had but to struggle back to their starting-points and they were safe. The peculiar character of Nansen's venture, however, was that there could be no retreat, because he had no base to fall back upon; the only alternative to success was destruction.

He selected for his companions three expert skiers, all single men, and all Norwegians. The first was Otto Sverdrup, a retired ship's captain, 33 years old, who had led an adventurous life on land and sea, and whose cool head, resourcefulness and determination made him an ideal man for such a journey. Next was Olaf Dietrichsen, 32, a lieutenant in the army; he undertook the meteorological observations practically alone, besides mapping the expedition's route. The third was Kristian Kristiansen Trana, a young man of 24, who worked at the forest farm of Sverdrup's father. Two Lapps were also taken, Balto and Ravna; they were good-natured and amiable, but afraid all the time, and could just as readily have been replaced by Norwegians.

For transport Nansen would have preferred dogs, but he could not get them; so he decided

to take five man-hauled sledges, weighing about 200 lb. each when loaded. These sledges, which he designed himself, were a complete success, and have since been copied repeatedly by other expeditions. They were 9 feet 6 inches long and 20 inches wide, with broad, steel-shod runners that would give a bearing on the soft snow; all the joints were lashed, the better to resist jolting. Besides skis, Indian snowshoes were provided, as well as the small Norwegian type called *trueger*; the latter, however, were partly *eaten* by Nansen and Sverdrup, who chewed the cherry wood during the march to slake their constant thirst. There were two reindeer-skin sleeping bags, three men to each. The party wore homespun woollen clothing, which was a success, and they had a tent in five pieces, which was not. To prevent snow-blindness they wore red veils, about the worst colour imaginable; and yet none of them suffered except Balto. Outside their clothes they wore thin windproof overalls, with hoods that made them look like monks. For cooking they had a special stove, using methylated spirit, with a boiler above in which to melt the snow; it took an hour to boil a gallon of hot chocolate. Each man also had to carry a flat tin flask full of snow next his skin, if he required

any drinking water on the march, so as to save the precious fuel. For provisions they largely relied on dried food—pemmican, meat chocolate, sugar, pea-soup, biscuits, totalling $2\frac{1}{4}$ lb. per man per day; but owing to the many delays this ration had to be drastically cut down. As they had to haul their dinner along behind them, everything had to be weighed, measured and packed in the greatest detail. Nansen, who was still a Spartan at this date, took a little tea and coffee, although grudgingly, but no spirits other than the alcohol for the stove; and although four of the six were smokers they had the merest trifle of tobacco. As delicacies for special occasions he included a little butter, cheese, whortleberry jam, condensed milk, &c. To all these things there had to be added two double-barrelled guns, ammunition, scientific instruments, glass flasks for taking air samples on the plateau, an axe, knives, files, needles, ice-axes, ropes, block and tackle for lifting the boats, and many other things; everything, in a word, was provided for beforehand, so far as was humanly possible. For now, as at all times, Nansen was extremely thorough; and he could never understand how other expeditions brought disaster upon themselves by neglecting what he considered obvious precautions.

At last all was ready, and on 2nd May most of the party sailed from Christiania for Leith. Nansen himself went via London, where he called at the Royal Geographical Society's office and made a favourable impression. It was impossible not to like this young man, with his massive build, his calm manner, bright eyes and frank, pleasant smile; he had but to be seen to find supporters, no matter how rash his schemes appeared on paper. Nevertheless his friends, both at home and abroad, "shook their heads doubtfully, as if to say, this is the last time we shall see you".

On 9th May, 1888, they left Leith on the Danish steamer *Thyra*, intending to be picked up in Iceland by the *Jason* while on its way to the East Greenland seal fishery. They soon learned that the ice this year had come farther south than ever before, and they could not get within 30 miles of the rendezvous on the east coast; the *Thyra* was therefore taken round to Reykjavik, in the south, and after a short stay ashore the expedition was taken to an alternative rendezvous at the little port of Thingeyre. Here they were landed, the *Thyra* firing a farewell salute in their honour. At Thingeyre Nansen bought a handsome little pony for the expedition, but it did not survive the rough voyage to Greenland.

On 3rd June they spotted a small steamer working her way into the fjord. She had on board his old friend, Captain Jacobsen of the *Jason*, who had come to fetch them. They said farewell to their kind Danish hosts and set out on their adventure, followed by hundreds of blue-and-white kittiwakes, screaming a raucous good-bye. The *Jason* sailed on the 4th, and the very next day they reached the ice and had to work southwards along its border. Bladdernose seals showed upon the floes and a few boats were sent out after them, with Sverdrup and Dietrichsen as passengers; meanwhile, Nansen shot a number of seals from the stern of the ship, those unhappy animals having by this time learned to fear a ship less than they feared its boats.

On 10th June, it having proved impossible to get in towards the coast, they returned north-east for sealing, sometimes in cold, clinging mist and sometimes in watery sunshine, with whales and seals half-asleep in the water. From Nansen's point of view these days were wasted, but it was part of his bargain, and the delay had to be endured patiently. At the beginning of July they discovered enormous numbers of seals "scattered about the ice like coffee"; more shooting;

more delay. A few days later they nearly came to a sudden end when the ship ran into a violent current, which whirled the great floes madly about and soon drove one into her; it struck her a tremendous blow near the stern, tearing off the rudder; a few yards farther forward, and she might have been sunk. Another day was lost in fixing the spare rudder which every sealing ship carries; then they set sail for Greenland once more. until at last the magic word "Land!" brought Nansen on deck; and there it lay, a majestic array of mighty cliffs, backed by gleaming peaks, some thirty-five miles distant. Turning southwards, the ship rapidly drew closer.

On 17th July Nansen, who was watching from the masthead, decided that the hour had come. Only ten to twelve miles of ice and sea separated them from the shore of Sermilik Fjord, and beyond that the inland ice stretched up like a broad white highway into the unknown. It was unreasonable to expect the *Jason* to venture closer in, with the likelihood of being beset there, so the order was given to launch the boat. At 7 p.m. they started, Nansen in his own boat, Sverdrup in a second which had been given them by Jacobsen. As their oars flashed in the sun three cheers rang out from the crew of the *Jason*, followed by the deep boom of

her two guns. The second mate, with a crew of twelve, was detailed to follow and help, but they got on so well at first that Nansen sent him back; and the last link with civilisation was now broken.

For a time the ice proved open enough to permit of rowing for long spells; then the sky darkened and rain began to pour down. They got into a kind of mill-race, where the floes banged madly against each other and churned up their shattered edges into moulds, while the boats often had to be hauled with all speed out of the water to avoid a nip. By persistence this danger was overcome too, and they made such good progress that they could see individual stones in the cliffs; but just at that moment the ice closed up, the boats had to be hauled up, and a sharp edge cut such a hole in Nansen's that there was nothing for it but to halt while Sverdrup and Dietrichsen repaired her. Meanwhile, the clouds had gathered once more, down came the rain again, and as the repair took several hours Nansen decided to camp. They had been 15 hours on the march and were exhausted. They crawled into their bags at 10 a.m. on 18th July, after a last glimpse of the distant *Jason*. As to the ship, she returned to Europe with the news that the expedition would probably land the same evening.

It was not to be so easy, however. Nansen's mettle was to be tested to the full, and many an anxious moment passed, before he and his men set foot on that inhospitable coast; for they had now got into the swift southerly current and were rapidly drifting away from the shore. After twenty-four hours in the tent, with rain forming puddles on its floor, they tried again to push across ice and water towards the land, chilled by the mist and constantly wet; but they were now twenty miles off instead of two. Nevertheless Nansen resolutely kept on athwart the current, until eventually they got some shelter beneath the lee of a stranded berg; by this time almost all of them had fallen into the icy sea, some more than once, and with no possibility of drying themselves. To save the fuel, he ordered that no hot food could be issued; they had to live on dry biscuit and raw pony meat, which disgusted the Lapps intensely. Fortunately, however, the good-natured Jacobsen had stored his boat's locker with a keg of beer and some bread and bacon; and this additional fare was duly shared out. Of course, all shared alike and all worked alike, at dirty jobs or clean; a principle to which Nansen unflinchingly adhered throughout his life.

Hourly now their peril increased, for the floes

were breaking up, there was a tremendous swell out at sea, and they could hear the distant breakers thundering upon the ice edge, while they themselves were carried helplessly towards it. Next morning (20th July) their own floe heaved up and down ominously, then split in two close to the tent; and they could see the ocean sparkling in the distance. The swell became heavier and heavier, the waves throwing up a rampart of shattered ice blocks on the edge of the floe. They now decided to move to a larger and stronger floe and there await events. Nansen remained calm, his men even jovial; but the Lapps, who were utterly afraid, took refuge under a tarpaulin and prayed. At this camp they had hot pea-soup, their first warm meal since leaving the *Jason*; but the swell was so great that it was difficult to keep the stove upright. Half a mile away the sea was hurling huge columns of spray into the air; "no living thing can ride the floes out there", writes Nansen, coolly, as he considers what to do next. He decided to share the supplies between the two boats and at the last instant try to launch them; one might get away, but even he was not optimistic enough to hope that the other would be spared. Curiously enough, there was no storm, but only this awe-inspiring swell; for the

sun shone brightly and the night was calm and peaceful, with nothing but the thunder of the billows to remind them of their peril.

They turned in, Sverdrup taking the first watch. During the night Nansen woke, to feel the floe rocking up and down and to hear the sound of water rushing by; but he also heard Sverdrup's measured tread and fell asleep again. Next day, when he awoke, the danger was past; the breakers were far away and the floe had turned towards the land. Yet it had been a near thing; several times during the night Sverdrup had stood by the tent door, prepared to turn everyone out. Once he actually undid one hook, when a huge crag of ice threatened for a moment to fall upon their floe and smash it. It passed. Then the surf washed right up to his feet. He undid another hook and waited for the next sea; but it never came, for at that instant the floe changed course and drifted away from the ice-edge and in towards the land. Thus were they providentially saved from almost certain destruction. Sverdrup was asked afterwards why he had not shared his responsibility. He merely answered, "It would have done no good for six of us to glare at it instead of one."

During the next few days they made progress

whenever possible, manhauling the boats across the floes, rowing through the occasional channels, and striving by main force to urge the floes apart with poles; but even then they could not hold their own against the current, which steadily carried them south. Sometimes the boats were nearly nipped; sometimes half the party would be on one floe and half on another; and once they were visited by a bear, which made off in the fog before Nansen could seize his rifle. Despite all these activities, the leader could find time at night to stand and admire the peaceful moonlit scene and the brilliant displays of the aurora overhead. But a crisis appeared to be approaching once more, for on the 27th they had come within half a mile of the open sea again; then another marvellous change of direction saved them, for their floe suddenly turned inwards towards the shore, and then began to go back to the north. Sverdrup, who was on watch, thought for a moment that the compass had gone mad. Next day there lay the long-sought open water near shore, with only a little ice beside the land. Nansen had the boats launched, and they left the hated floes for good, rowing across to the shore, with Norwegian and Danish flags unfurled; at last they came to a desolate little island, but it was land, real land,

with moss, grass and flowers. Here they disembarked, and soon the chocolate in the cooker was bubbling merrily.

They were on the island of Kekertarsuak, not so very far north of Cape Farewell; but they had at least reached Greenland, a thing which had several times during recent days seemed impossible. Nansen was so delighted that when the gnats which infest this shore began to bite him he let them do it for a time in peace. The place was named Gamel's Haven, after their patron.

It was now so late in the season that their wisest course would have been to make their way round Cape Farewell to the west coast settlements: months might be consumed in struggling north again along the eastern shore, to be followed perhaps by death through starvation. Nansen thought otherwise. Without a moment's doubt he ordered an advance to the north, intending by pertinacity and sheer hard work to make up as much as possible of the ground which had been lost during the drift.

At 5 o'clock that evening they made a start, sometimes rowing, sometimes forcing a way by opening the floes, but steadily going ahead; the leader toiled like a hero of old, ever first at the dirty or dangerous task; and the others loyally

supported him. Next day it was the same, but then came an unexpected interlude. All this coast was believed to be uninhabited, but after dinner Balto shouted, "I can see two men". There they were, out at sea, two Eskimos, paddling their peculiar canoes, or kayaks, towards the rocks; they came on quite fearlessly, landed, and by signs the two parties became friendly, although Nansen's little vocabulary of Eskimo words proved useless. The Eskimos, bright, fat little men of tawny hue, with long straight black hair, and clad in skins, could not understand how the strangers had come in from across the icy ocean. They thought that there must be something supernatural about them; and after admiring their boats they departed to the north.

Some hours later Nansen followed, the boats keeping along the shore, beneath the magnificent blue edge of a glacier from which slices were continually falling into the sea; but here as always the party escaped. When off Cape Bille they heard the sound of voices and the barking of dogs; it was the Eskimo camp to which their recent visitors belonged. They could not resist the temptation to visit them, being received "with beaming smiles and kindness on all sides". The big Norwegians entered one of the communal

dwellings. a large hut in which four or five families dwelt in open stalls, with a train-oil lamp before each that burnt day and night, and great pots of hot food simmering above the lamps. The air in this place was so thick that some of the party could not stand it and had to rush outside again. The Eskimos gave Nansen small pieces of seal-skin line, the only wealth that these poor people had to offer; later he presented them in return with a number of empty tins. The expedition pitched its tent and supped before an admiring multitude; but no attempt was made to steal anything, and the little men even helped to haul the boats ashore, putting twenty or thirty men to each. Next day Nansen walked round the settlement, making friends and taking photographs. He was an enthusiastic photographer, and throughout his many journeys his camera never left him; but he could not achieve more than ordinary amateur skill. On the other hand, his pencil sketches and water-colour drawings, of which he executed a good many, were admirably clear and lifelike.

The Eskimos of this region have no permanent home, but wander from camp to camp usually in search of seals or fish, which they capture from their kayaks, or off the floes, with extraordinary

skill. The Cape Bille party was about to break up; one body going northwards, another setting out for the southern point of Greenland and the trading stations in the west. Long before Nansen's men started they had vanished, with the single exception of one kayaker who stayed behind to show the strangers the way; but once the heavy boats were afloat and six pairs of powerful arms were at the oars, this man was left behind, and soon afterwards they came up with the main party. The eskimos were stopped by ice that stretched right up to the beach. Nansen showed them how to force a way through, by thrusting the floes apart with poles; so two of the Eskimos tried to imitate him with a couple of thin sticks, needless to say without result. A storm of rain came on and the Eskimos would not start; but Nansen, who cared nothing for storms, had his boats turned out to cross a fjord, only to find that in the middle there was a terrible commotion, the ice blocks crashing together and plunging about in the most terrifying way; but "forward" was still his order, and they got across "somehow".

Day after day they pushed on in the same way, strictly rationed and living largely on cold or raw food; only twice in twelve days did they enjoy a hot meal. Not the least disagreeable feature was

the presence of swarms of mosquitoes everywhere, which got into their ears, eyes, necks, and even into their mouths with the food; only when afloat could these pests be avoided, and even then not without whirling one's coat round in the air.

By 11th August they had covered as much ground as many expeditions make in a season, and had reached a point from which the ascent to the interior seemed practicable. On their left hand a gleaming white glacier ran from the inland ice right down to the sea; straight ahead was the tooth-like Mt. Kiatak; inland, some 400 miles of unknown Greenland lay between them and their objective, the west coast town of Christianshaab. Nansen decided to turn inland; and now the cooker came into its own again, for hot food had become a necessity.

While the camp was being established Nansen and Sverdrup made a reconnaissance on skis, following a ridge between two arms of the glacier. At first their boots were mercilessly cut about by the sharp rocks; then came deep snow, with a thin, treacherous crust through which they fell at every step; then still more dangerous cracks or crevasses, anything up to several hundred feet deep, sometimes hidden by the snow, and into which both men fell to the armpits. Nansen

had taken the precaution of tying himself and Sverdrup together with a stout alpine rope; however; and despite the nasty feeling of emptiness when their feet suddenly dangled in the air, they always managed to get out again. They penetrated inland for ten miles, reaching a height of 3,000 feet; beyond them the glacier still rose, with ice-flecked peaks standing sentinel-like beside the route; behind them, far below, was the blue sea with its patches of floating ice, sparkling in the sun. Clearly, thought Nansen, here is a means—difficult, but certainly practicable—of getting up on the ice-cap. Another obstacle had been surmounted.

Although night was drawing on they decided to find a new road back to the camp, but soon got involved in a maze of crevasses of unknown depth; they looked terrifying enough in the gloom, especially as it was soon not easy to see any possible way out of them; but “forward” was still the motto. Sometimes they walked over the crevasses on quaking snow bridges, at others even Nansen would not venture thus, but gently crept across on hands and knees; frequently, too, even this feeble aid failed, and they had to walk a long way beside the abyss, until it became narrow enough to jump across. At last they



NANSEN'S GREENLAND JOURNEY

came down to running water, a great relief after their thirsty day on the frozen hills; they sat down beneath the shelter of a cliff and supped on cold pemmican, chocolate and biscuit. Then it began to rain. It was so dark that they could not see more than two or three paces ahead; but they still persevered, and at 5 o'clock in the morning staggered wearily into the camp, crept into the bags, and were asleep in an instant.

Before attempting the ascent, all six now had to turn cobbler by strengthening their boots. The boats were then beached upside down, weighted with stones, together with a record of their adventures, which was left in a tin box.

As it was distinctly warm during the day and the snow very soft, Nansen decided to march only at night. At 9 p.m. on 15th August the ascent began. At first progress was slight, three men having to be put to each sledge, and although the weights were redistributed, each still had to haul 200 lb. This was desperately hard work. Nansen, who was always quite frank about changing his opinions, soon came to learn the value of hot tea; he now thought that, with condensed milk, it was "a pleasure almost divine". Just as they were falling asleep that night, they discovered that their only piece of cheese had been left behind at



Nansen and his companions crossing Greenland

dinner-time; Dietrichsen, who volunteered to go back for it, was regarded by his tired comrades as a hero in consequence.

On the 17th they began to have difficulty with the crevasses. As a rule the long sledges went across easily, though every now and then somebody fell through, always escaping with a shaking. They camped at noon on a flat ledge of the glacier, with a huge, gaping crevasse on each side. Rain began to pour down, the wind increased to a gale, and there they had to stay for three whole days, listening to the frenzied flap-flap of the tent, telling stories, or sleeping; on account of this delay the ration was once again cut down, Nansen only allowing one full meal per day.

The march was resumed on the morning of the 20th. The ice now became worse and worse, and it was awful work dragging and shoving the sledges over the innumerable ridges of ice; the ropes cut their shoulders as if they were being burned. Even Kristiansen, who rarely complained, suddenly remarked to Dietrichsen, "What fools men must be to let themselves in for work like this!" To make matters worse, they had now passed the limit of water and began to suffer from unquenchable thirst, an ordeal that was to pursue them like a nightmare for weeks to come;

but Nansen, who was nothing if not resourceful, hit on the idea of pouring lemonade powder over fresh snow, and they all pronounced it excellent. He also tried again to lighten the sledges without abandoning the loads, and for a start decided to destroy the oilcloth covers in which the sleeping bags had been packed. They were burnt for fuel, with disastrous results; for the fumes filled the tent, making it unendurable, and covering everybody in soot from head to foot, except for their white eyeballs and teeth. Of course, they never washed; for one thing, there was no water, and for another, it was too cold, being about fifty to sixty degrees below zero.

After a week they began to cook as they marched, putting the cooker at the back of one of the sledges; when the snow had melted, the cubes of soup were added. As soon as it boiled they halted, pitched the tent, and carried the pot in—and then Nansen accidentally overset the lot! The tent floor was hastily raised and the whole mixture, including dirt and the spilt methylated spirit, was poured in again and boiled up afresh; and the hungry men thoroughly enjoyed their dinner! A very similar accident happened to Shackleton during Captain Scott's first great march towards the South Pole.

Every day the glacier led higher and higher into the frozen wastes. By 26th August they were 6000 feet above the sea and still rising; it was intensely cold, but the work of tugging sledges up a slope of 1 in 4 (which is steeper than most English hill roads) warmed their blood even if it made their bones ache.

Nansen now decided to change course. They had been opposed by a bitter head wind; but by directing the march towards the more southerly town of Godthaab (Good Hope), advantage could be taken of this wind to rig up a sail; the distance, too, would be shorter, but nobody knew how they would get down off the ice—they had to trust blindly to their leader's skill and good fortune. Parts of the tent were made into two sails and hoisted, and by this means, with two men ahead of each sledge and one behind to steer, they made good another five miles. Then a storm came down, with masses of whirling drift snow, almost burying the unfortunate explorers in their tent. When at last they tried to get on, Christiansen strained his knee and had to have it massaged in the open for several days. The Lapps developed snow blindness; and the loose, deep snow proved very unfavourable for skis. But still Nansen pushed on; there was no alter-

native. He and Sverdrup tried the Indian snowshoes, which they had never used before, and they tumbled about repeatedly, much to the joy of the Lapps, who would not use them under any circumstances: eventually they went back to skis again.

By the beginning of September they were at last fairly upon the plateau, a flat, snow-covered wilderness, 8000 to 9000 feet above the sea, with absolutely nothing to be seen in any direction. Over this they travelled steadily for more than a fortnight, every day resembling the others. The sky at night was wonderful, with brilliant flashing by the aurora and calm moonlit peacefulness; during some part of every day it snowed, fine powdery dust that got into everything. The temperature fell below the scale of the thermometers, but must have been almost — 50°C . (80 to 90 degrees of frost). Even in the tent, with six men and the stove, they registered 72 degrees of frost; but they were all abnormally hardy and did not suffer much, although once the tent was almost torn to pieces by a gale. Beneath its thin crust the soft snow was so deep that though they sank sledge poles in it they could find no bottom. During these waterless days their thirst was extreme; and as every drop of fuel was precious,

the cooker, which had been used at night for pea-soup, was employed without being washed next morning for tea or chocolate.

By 19th September they were going downhill on the western side, aided by a favourable wind that enabled them to sail the sledges. Nansen and Sverdrup took the first sledge, each alternately steering and hanging on behind; the steersman's job was decidedly risky, for he had to keep his skis so fixed as to dodge any obstacles; if he slipped, the heavy sledge would assuredly have run over him, with disastrous consequences. Towards night Nansen discerned a dark spot in front, and, not recognizing it, only pulled up when on the very edge of a crevasse; another yard, and the sledge, with both men, must have gone over. He ran back, waving his hands, and shouting, but was only just in time to stop Dietrichsen, who had been following merrily on his leader's trail. On another occasion, while exploring ahead, Nansen fell unobserved into a crevasse, and as he had his skis on he had the utmost difficulty to get out again. Some days later, when all their difficulties seemed overcome, and they were venturing across two partially frozen lakes, several of them very nearly fell in; but Nansen's wonderful luck still held good, and

nothing happened. On 26th September they reached the head of Ameralik Fjord, with a muddy flat ahead, the sea in the distance, and dwarf willows and heather bushes all around; still more important, fresh water was close at hand, in which all six literally immersed themselves, drinking and drinking to slake their thirst. Then a great open-air fire was made, in honour of the occasion, and the dinner was soon cooking: no more restrictions of diet, no more weary, back-aching sledge work. Greenland was crossed; and that which everyone before the start had thought madness was now an accomplished fact. The journey across the inland ice had been about 260 miles.

They were still 50 miles from Godthaab, and Nansen decided to leave Dietrichsen at the camp with the rest, while he and Sverdrup pushed ahead for help. They constructed a boat out of the canvas of the tent floor, with a framing of bamboos from the sledges and such willow twigs as were straight enough; she was a curious craft, built mainly by Sverdrup, and looked just like the forward half of an ordinary ship's boat. Of course the boat leaked a good deal, but that could not be helped.

In this crazy craft Nansen and Sverdrup trusted

their lives on the ocean. They had to carry her through knee-deep mud and quicksands to the centre of the fjord. before they could find enough water to launch her: and then, with ski-staffs for oars. they pulled out to sea and after four days of struggling against tide, wind and current, reached the little settlement. Before arriving, however, they stopped to make an end of the "iron rations"; it was a feast so grand, after their rigid economy of the last two months, that whenever Nansen wished to put Sverdrup in good humour thereafter, all he had to do was to recall this dinner. The first person they met, a young missionary, upon learning Nansen's name, gravely congratulated him on winning his doctor's degree; an event of which Nansen had been aware before he started!

Immediate efforts were now set afoot to bring in the others. There was a considerable delay owing to storms, but eventually a veritable swarm of new friends poured down upon the little camp, and Dietrichsen and his three fellow adventurers were carried back to Godthaab in triumph.

So ended this most bold and perilous, but well-planned and bravely executed journey. It had one curious result, which most people who have made long sledge trips have experienced. For

some time the explorers could not appease their hunger, and Sverdrup even used to indulge in two daily breakfasts with his hospitable Greenland friends.

Meanwhile the last vessel to leave for Europe, the *Fox*, had already sailed; but Nansen sent a swift Eskimo messenger in a kayak, who caught her up; she could not return, but she carried the news of the exploit to Europe, where it caused a sensation.

Nansen and his people had to spend the winter in Greenland, but that is not as bad as it sounds; especially if, like Fridtjof Nansen, you have the knack of making friends wherever you go. He spent much of his time among the Eskimos, with whom he became on the best of terms; Sverdrup they only knew as "The Steersman" or "The Captain", but Nansen was "The Very Big One". He also took up the dangerous sport of kayaking, to which he subsequently owed his life more than once. A kayak is a skin canoe, pointed at both ends and completely covered over, except for a round hole into which the occupant squeezes his body; using a double paddle, an expert can defy the heaviest waves—indeed, he flies into the teeth of them, and can roll over and over in the water without mishap.

The risk is very great, however; the brave and promising young explorer Watkins was drowned in a kayak only a few years ago. Nansen, who was utterly fearless, would put out to sea with the boldest of his mentors; and once he went so far, and was away so long, that they thought him lost, and began to raise wails of lamentation, when back he came calmly out of the sea, quite regardless of the scare that he had caused.

Early in the spring (15th April), the Danish steamer *Hvidbjörnen* came to Godthaab and, taking the adventurous party on board, brought them back to Copenhagen.

CHAPTER V

Farthest North

The crossing of Greenland placed Nansen, at twenty-seven, in the front rank of polar explorers; it also introduced him to the new and as yet unfamiliar rôle of social lion, lecturer and author. He wrote an account of the journey, *The First Crossing of Greenland*, 1890, which was speedily translated into English; it is undoubtedly the best of his books of travel. Soon after his return he told the story of the expedition to a crowded meeting of the R.G.S. in London; a little later the Society awarded him its Patron's Medal, the highest honour but one in its gift. This lecture was repeated at many places in England and abroad. In England he spoke in excellent English, at Berlin in equally excellent German. Everywhere his commanding figure and charming personality made an ineffaceable impression.

Meanwhile he had become engaged to be married to Eva Sars, a noted singer, and daughter of an eminent Norse naturalist. Nansen had

literally fallen head over heels in love with her some time before; for during an excursion he one day detected a pair of legs sticking out of the snow. He hauled the owner out, to find her this young lady, who had taken a header into a drift. He became extremely attached to her, and in September they were married. They built a new home on the beautiful shore of a little bay in the fjord just west of Christiania, and within easy reach of the University, where he had just accepted the post of Curator of Zoology. The house was named Godthaab, in memory of Greenland days.

It was impossible, however, that a man like Nansen should be tied down to routine study. He had not even returned from Greenland before projects were afoot to send him north again; and as soon as he landed his enthusiastic friend, Consul Axel Heiberg, handed him a purse of £562 towards the cost of another expedition. Nansen talked at first of a second journey to Greenland, mapping the totally unknown north-eastern coast, and crossing the great island at its widest point; but there was larger game afoot. His friends had already suggested that, since Norway had taken the lead in reviving Arctic travel, why should there not be a national ex-

pedition to the North Pole, with Nansen in command?

To Nansen himself this idea, though very attractive, was by no means new; it had been in his thoughts for years. The polar problem was one of the two most outstanding mysteries of the earth's surface, a mystery, too, which three and a half centuries of toil and loss had not advanced a jot: no man had ever got beyond $83\frac{1}{2}$ degrees North, and what lay beyond that circle was wholly unknown. His own ideas were clear and simple; he thought that others had failed because they had adopted the wrong methods, but people gasped when he stated what he considered to be the right ones. After his lecture tours he had been back in Christiania only a few months when he laid a definite plan before the Geographical Society; King Oscar was present, and Nansen methodically and resolutely expounded his ideas before him.

He began by pointing out that nobody could take boats or ships into the Arctic against the resistless masses of drifting ice; but with the right kind of ship it would be easy to use that very ice to further one's plans and drift across the Pole without even hoisting a sail. Driftwood from central Asia, rolling down the great Siberian

rivers to the deltas of the Lena and Yenesei, was constantly caught up by the floes there and carried more than 2000 miles to the west, ending up either at Spitsbergen or upon the Greenland shore; and this showed that there must be a regular current in that direction. Only one ship had ever attempted the voyage, the American *Jeannette*, which had sailed north through Bering Strait with the idea of exploring the possibilities of an advance on the Pole from that side; unintentionally she became frozen fast in the ice, and after drifting for almost two years was crushed and sunk 500 miles north of the Lena delta. Her commander, De Long, marched his crew back across the floes towards Siberia, but they were separated during a storm; one party, under Lt. Melville, reached the delta and wintered there, the other perished of hardships and starvation.

This was in 1881. Four years later Melville published an account of the voyage, in which he said that if the *Jeannette* had not been crushed she would probably have drifted along the very line which the *Fram* subsequently took; but he did not believe it possible that a ship could survive the tremendous pressures out there. Sooner or later, he thought, "two floes would close upon

and overwhelm it like an almond in the jaws of a nutcracker". This, then, was the opinion of the only officer who had ever been there; for all previous experience covered only the Greenland and Canadian sides.

Nansen admitted the drift, but he pooh-poohed the risks. Shortly before Melville's book appeared, a pair of oilskin breeches, a provision list, and a list of boats from the *Jeannette* turned up on the S.W. coast of Greenland; and Nansen, who had been struck during his *Viking* cruise by the Siberian driftwood, saw in a flash the solution of the polar problem. The floes had carried these relics safely across an immense extent of sea, and had brought them down between Spitsbergen and Greenland with the current against which he himself had struggled so vainly; they had then been caught by the other current which set northwards towards Godthaab. And if papers could safely make such a remarkable journey, then so could men. All that was needed was a vessel capable of taking them. During their long voyage of some 2900 miles, the *Jeannette* relics must have travelled on the average two miles per day; three or four years, then, would be needed for the enterprise.

He proposed to build a special ship, having

sides so shaped that she would slip up like an eel out of the cold embrace of the floes, and rest on the ice as in a cradle, undamaged. He would provision her for five years, and, with a crew of a dozen men, would take his ship along the route followed by the ill-fated *Jeannette*; later, however, he modified this plan in favour of reaching the place where that vessel had sunk by way of North Russia and Siberia. Owing to the ample time on their hands, the party would be able to make continuous scientific observations of many kinds. Should anything go wrong, and the ship be lost, then he would march his men over the ice, with sledges and kayaks, to Spitsbergen or Novaya Zemlya. If they got into a backwater, they would "have to get out as they had got in"; this was Nansen all over. Even if they failed to drift across the Pole it would not matter much; for the Pole itself was but a point—what *was* important was to explore the vast and utterly unknown sea.

The project was approved; for there is much truth in the old saw that nothing succeeds like success. The Storthing, which had refused him £275 to go to Greenland, now gave him £11,250 for a much more hazardous enterprise. King Oscar gave £1125; Nansen's friends, Axel Heiberg

and Mr. Ringnes (a wealthy brewer), collected the rest by subscription in a few days; the total cost exceeded £25,000, a very great deal for a poor country like Norway to find.

The Royal Geographical Society contributed £300, although all its experts opposed the project. Nansen came over and explained his plans in full, all the best surviving Arctic experience of Britain being at the meeting. M'Clintock, most resolute and skilled of them all, said that it was "the most adventurous programme ever brought to the notice of this Society"; he thought that the ship would be crushed during the winter pressures. Sir George Nares and Sir Allen Young also thought that once she was fixed in the ice she would be immovable until it crushed her. Several others refused to believe in the trans-Polar current at all; while General Greely, who had led an Arctic expedition during 1881-4, and had attained the then farthest north, wrote that he thought it "almost incredible" that such foolish ideas should receive encouragement; he then proceeded to tear Nansen's plan to pieces, item by item. Nansen listened quietly to all this, smiled, and said: "I thank you for your opinions, but I shall go just the same."

His preparations went ahead. A noted ship-



Fridtjof Nansen, 1893
From a drawing by Werenskiöld

builder, Colin Archer, designed a peculiar vessel, with bow, stern and keel all rounded off, so as to give the ice no purchase; she was much larger than originally intended, being 402 tons, 128 feet long and extremely wide—36 feet; she was undeniably the strongest vessel of her type ever built of wood. On 26th October, she was launched at Laurvik, not more than fifty miles from Nansen's home; his wife dropped the champagne bottle against her bows, with the words: "Your name is *Fram*," while Nansen held her hand tightly as he watched the hull slip easily into the sea. *Fram* means "Forward"; and that was the very word for such a ship and for such a voyage: "Forward, whatever happens!"

He thought out the details of equipment to the last item. In addition to the ordinary boats, the *Fram* was to take two long-boats, which could carry the entire crew if needful, with provisions for many months. Special attention was paid to the possibility of scurvy, the most dreaded enemy of polar travellers; and every single article of food was carefully analysed and packed. Thermometers, barometers, special instruments, electroscopes, had to be assembled and tested, photographic and sounding apparatus, materials for a workshop, timber for many purposes, and a

thousand and one other necessities of polar travel provided; and all this Nansen did himself, supervising and closely studying everything. Meanwhile, of course, his professional duties could not be neglected; and he even found time to publish a paper on the Greenland Eskimos. Baron von Toll, himself a noted scientist and explorer of the New Siberian Islands, volunteered to send the expedition thirty dogs from the interior; and Mr. Kelch, a public-spirited Siberian gentleman, not only undertook the expense of conveying these dogs 1000 miles to the Arctic shore, but he also arranged for food depots to be left at fixed localities on the New Siberian Islands in case of shipwreck. Von Toll personally established these depots during May, 1893; it was pathetic that he himself should perish in that very region ten years afterwards. In order to save the *Fram's* small store of coal, the *Urania* was chartered to take a cargo of that commodity almost to the southern end of Novaya Zemlya.

Applications to join poured in, but only Norwegians were accepted. Sverdrup went as captain. He was now married and had one child; Nansen himself was in the same case, and many of the others were married, too. Lieut. Scott-Hansen, of the navy, undertook the meteorolo-

logical, astronomical and magnetic work. Dr. Blessing acted as botanist. The mate of the *Fram* was T. C. Jacobsen, Anton Amundsen the chief engineer. Lars Pettersen his second, and A. Juell proved a most efficient cook. Frederick H. Johansen, a lieutenant in the reserve, was so eager to go that he agreed to serve as stoker. The harpooner was Peter Henriksen, the electrician B. Nordahl; and Ivar Mogstad served as seaman. Thus they numbered twelve, but Bern̄ Bentzen, who joined later, made them thirteen: "unlucky numbers" never troubled Nansen.

On Midsummer Day, 1893, the *Fram* weighed anchor and steamed past the crowded quays of Christiania, escorted by craft of every kind; for all Norway had heard of the *Fram*, and was determined to give her a good send-off. Next day she picked up the two long-boats at Laurvik, where she had been built; and her designer, Colin Archer, himself steered her out of the bay. Then he, along with Nansen's two brothers, went back, and the famous voyage started—a voyage the end of which no man could foresee.

The *Fram* was of strange design and right strangely did she now behave. She rolled like a log, while neighbouring ships were scarcely moving; water poured aboard and swept into the

charthouse; casks and other loose objects floated wildly up and down the decks; and everyone was soaked to the skin and heartily miserable. not least Nansen, the acting captain, who had to direct the ship from the bridge and struggle against seasickness at the same time. Fortunately they ran into a fog, behind the kindly veil of which the ship was got into order and everything lashed fast. They put into Bergen, where sirens shrieked and flags waved, and Nansen had to go ashore and deliver a lecture; a banquet followed. with dancing until far into the night. Next morning, Sunday, they continued the northward journey in bright sunshine, followed for some distance by many of Nansen's old friends. From every little port along the coast steamers or sailing ships put out to see the *Fram*, and even humble rowing boats, manned by bronzed and horny-handed fishermen, stole out of the fjords: no wonder Nansen felt that his mission was a truly national one. Near Trondhjem Sverdrup came aboard, bringing the medicine chest. They passed up the rocky coast, with the green and lovely Lofoten Islands on one side and the inviting mouths of mountainous fjords on the other; but now the weather changed, and at Tromsøe, where they took in coal and reindeer skins, the work had to

be done in a gale, with bitterly cold rain and sleet. Off the North Cape it became so rough, and the *Fram* rolled so much, that they had to put back again in order to shift the coal and rearrange the cargo. On 17th July they made their last call, at Vardo, almost the most northerly town in the country, being greeted by a band, with flag-waving, speeches and the inevitable banquet: they were here some days, but at last Nansen called up the captain at three o'clock in the morning, and the *Fram* silently disappeared into the Arctic mists.

For days they sailed to the east under depressing conditions; fog was in their throats, in their eyes, dripping from the rigging, clinging damply to every garment; as if the combined spirits of all the navigators of old had assembled here, to utter the warning, Proceed no farther!

A glance at the map will show you that the narrow, finger-like islands of Novaya Zemlya curve away from the North Russian coast into the Arctic Ocean like a huge natural breakwater: and as the currents there run mainly towards the west, all the masses of floating ice which have collected off Siberia are drifted down upon this rocky wall, filling the Kara Sea except for a brief space each summer. For the same reason the

lee side, i.e. the west—is usually ice-free; but whether or not one can get a ship through the three narrow and intricate straits into the Kara Sea is a question which it is impossible to answer except on the spot, and this was Nansen's first problem.

On 27th July they met their first ice, a bad augury; next morning it could be discerned stretching away into the fog in all directions, nevertheless Nansen pushed the *Fram* straight into it, worming and twisting her way through the ever-changing channels like a live thing; and now he learnt for the first time the enormous strength and ideal shape of his ship. Once through this ice, they made for Yugor Strait as fast as sail and steam could carry them, and on the 30th reached the narrow passage, anchoring at its western end, off the few huts and red flagstaff which comprised the "town" of Khabarova. Here the dogs were to be taken on board. Trondheim, who had successfully brought his unwieldy team of thirty-four barking, biting and quarrelling Siberian dogs more than 1000 miles, was rewarded by the gift of a special medal. He was vastly impressed by the orderliness on board the *Fram*, where every man had his fixed duties, down to the smallest detail. He also noted how

they all sat down to table together, and how Nansen, though leader of the expedition, was not above being coal-shifter-in-chief at one moment and greaser to the engineer, Amundsen, at the next; all of which to the Russian mind seemed very strange and unnatural.

While the engine was being overhauled Sverdrup, Nansen, and Peter Henriksen took the petroleum launch to the far end of the strait, twenty-eight miles away, noting with concern the endless shoals and dangerous rocks, both awash and just submerged; as everything was buried in mist, the prospects looked exciting. The sea beyond seemed full of ice, except near the mainland; but at least it was possible to get into the Kara Sea, which was all that Nansen wanted to know for the present—future difficulties must be solved as they arose. The three men landed in search of game, wandering across the mossy green tundra, still gay with its patches of forget-me-nots and other homely northern flowers. They shot forty ducks and geese, and a seal. On the way back Nansen ran the launch on to a sunken reef, but got her off again with a broken propeller blade; then the lead line became entangled with the engine and brought it to a standstill, so that they had to row back very ingloriously after all.

That evening Nansen tried his hand at sledge-driving, with ten dogs on the traces and himself in the middle. No sooner had he started than the dogs spotted a stranger, upon which they rushed in an instant, dragging him and the sledge after them. Trontheim tore round and round, shouting and swearing and striking right and left; then Nansen, who had been "dumb with fright", hurled himself into the thick of the *mêlée* and removed the culprit. Trontheim cracked his whip, and off they all went again, and although Nansen pulled with all his might he only stopped them when he was almost in the sea. The harness is a strap or rope round the dog's back and belly, and tied to its collar; the driver guides him by a single trace. Driving is an art so special that later expeditions have often found it profitable to take a trained Russian dog-team driver. Nansen, at least, was very thoughtful on this subject for a long time afterwards!

On 3rd August, the thirty-four dogs were shipped, being tied up forward, where they howled mournfully; poor brutes, they would have howled still more had they known the fate in store for them. Christofersen, Nansen's secretary, who had come all this way from home, now went ashore with Trontheim; they were to be

picked up by the coaling ship, the *Urania*, for which Nansen could wait no longer. The *Fram* then got under way; and with Nansen ahead in the launch, and Scott-Hansen sounding continually from the bows, they felt their way through the strait, scarcely visible to each other, and with the ship out of sight, although she was only just behind. Apart from one incident, the passage of the strait was uneventful, but that incident might well have ended the voyage. The engine of the launch kept stopping and to help it along Nansen poured oil over it; but just at that moment the launch lurched, the oil took fire, and in an instant both he and the stern were ablaze. He at once ran to the other end and beat out the flames from his clothes; then he darted back again and flung a blazing pail of oil overboard, only, of course, to spread the flames over the sea. Finally, he got hold of a baler and extinguished the fire by drenching everything in water.

As soon as they emerged from Yugor Strait the fog lifted; but now there were other obstacles, the ice stretching solidly across the Kara Sea, except for a more or less open lane near the shore; and there, of course, it was extremely dangerous and shallow. This route was followed, hugging the ice-edge, until they reached the flat, treeless

wilderness of Yalmal. where nothing but fog, tundra, loons and snipe could be seen; it was inhabited by the half-wild and brutish Samoyedes, two of whom visited the ship. These were the last people to be seen by the expedition for nearly three years.

Progress now became extremely slow, calling out all that virtue of patience which polar explorers are supposed to have so much of, but which their diaries show that they very often lack. For days the *Fram* made practically no progress; she would be driven into a lane, only to find solid ice ahead, with a white glare in the sky betokening the same conditions for a long distance; then back again, only to find her retreat barred, and so on. One good wind would have swept all this ice out to sea, leaving a clear passage; at last it came, but like most of Nature's bounties, more boisterously than was expected. The *Fram*, seizing her chance, passed the mouth of the Obi, but she was so unwieldy and so heavily laden that she ploughed and rolled about, labouring in the heavy seas alarmingly. At this moment the unlucky launch elected to come off its davits, and it was well on the way to being smashed to pieces by the waves as they tumbled over the rail, when Nansen and a stout-hearted gang seized it and lashed it

fast. During these wild hours nothing was safe on the *Fram*, unless it was tied down.

They drove past Dickson Island, a low green land at the mouth of the Yenesei; it had been intended to leave letters here, but the chance of making further progress was too good to be lost, so they continued without stopping. The mainland now became higher; offshore were many islands, mostly uncharted, for apart from Norden-skiold in 1878, very few ships had ever visited this desolate region. As the boiler needed refitting, the *Fram* was stopped off the Kjellman Islands, and Nansen and some others landed in search of game; for he relied on fresh meat to ward off scurvy. The party's adventures had their comic side, although nobody perceived it at the time.

Nansen himself had spotted a small herd of reindeer, but after getting to leeward of them, by crawling on hands and knees through a gully that was deep in mud and water, found himself out of range; whenever he moved up the reindeer moved on. It became dark, and he could not see the sight on his rifle; and although he fired repeatedly he missed every time. The disconsolate sportsman then returned to Sverdrup, who had shot two reindeer out of six, some distance away, but could not, of course, retrieve them single-

handed. Meanwhile Johansen and Henriksen had shot a bear, which they also had left behind. It was decided that Sverdrup should go back to the *Fram*, while the others collected the meat. Morning was coming on, and while looking for the bear they found another one asleep, which Nansen promptly killed. They tried to drag the bears down to the boat, but they were too heavy; there was nothing for it but to skin them and cut them up, afterwards trudging through the soft clay with their heavy loads of raw meat. Meanwhile the tide had risen, there was a heavy surf, and waves were tumbling merrily into the boat; a little bread, their only food, was floating in the water, and the butter-dish was on the bottom, empty. After much exertion they got the boat up out of the surf and emptied it; they were not cheered at finding sand in everything, even in the locks of the rifles, and they had nothing to eat except pieces of bread soaked in sea-water and flavoured with dirt. During the excitement, Nansen lost his sketch-book. Then they launched the boat again, and while the surf broke over her they hauled the pieces of bear aboard with a line.

Now came the journey to the other carcasses. a hard, stern row against wind and sea, with empty stomachs; meanwhile, seals dived around

them, and white whales came and went. After great exertions they reached the bay where the reindeer were, just in time to frighten a bear away; as there was no use in shooting it, Nansen held his hand, and it ambled off. They waded ashore, and then found that by no exertions could they get the reindeer into the boat, so after all they had to be left to the tender mercies of bruin.

The return to the ship, says Nansen, was "the hardest row I ever had a hand in". There was an extremely fast tide, waves broke over them, and they were all wet through and thoroughly miserable; nor could they make any progress against it, barely holding their own; yet all this time the ship was quite close by. So they had to go back under the land again and come out at a different angle, but just as they were abreast of the *Fram* the current carried them off once more. Cursing furiously, they called for help, and at last someone threw out a buoy; but they could not reach it at first; and then, when by a superhuman effort they did get up to it, the buoy was mistakenly hauled in again. So back the tired men went once more, once more they came down to windward of the ship, and roared for the buoy; and even when they held it they had to continue rowing, otherwise the strain would have snapped the line.

"We had shot two reindeer which we did not get," says Nansen, ruefully; "got two bears that we had no use for, and had totally ruined one suit of clothes."

Day after day slipped by, the ship continuing to make progress, though very slowly; this was a sore trial to Nansen's patience, for he knew that unless they could pass Cape Chelyuskin before mid-September, they would be doomed to spend the winter in this shallow and dangerous sea. There was no help for it, however, but to keep hammering away, taking advantage of every opportunity to advance, and not giving way to despair. Off Taimyr Island they came to a dead halt; Nordenskiöld, the only other man who had ever been through here in a ship, had found a strait, but now it was choked with ice. Never mind! The floes were crowded with seals, and Nansen went out after them, fresh meat being a good guarantee of a healthy crew. At one moment he had thoughts of forcing his way into the strait, and during a gale, when the floes were tossing about, he actually ordered the ship's head to be turned thither; but then—fortunately, perhaps—the storm died down and the ice closed up impassably again. The same storm had blown the floes away from the land, and through the

channel thus made the *Fram* crept round the island northwards, with only a few feet to spare beneath her.

Hereabouts the sea did strange things. There was so much ice that at the surface the water was drinkable: farther down, however, it was too salt to use in the ship's boiler. When fresh water lies on salt, like this, it is very difficult to pass a ship through, the "dead water" sticking almost like treacle; and once the *Fram* only made twenty miles after steaming all night.

Fog hung persistently around them. Sunshine, indeed, was so rare that on one occasion when Nordahl was working among the coals in the hold, and the sunshine streamed through, he mistook the ray for a plank, leaned on it, and fell through on to some lumber!

Now the northernmost point of the Old World, Cape Chelyuskin, rose bold and steep in the distance, with high mountains behind it. They had hopes of clearing it after all; but then the barometer fell alarmingly, heavy squalls sprang up, and Sverdrup wanted to take shelter while they could. "No," said Nansen, "we must get every ounce out of her and go while we have the chance." It was a wise decision. With every sail spread, and steam up as well, the *Fram* rounded the

dreaded Cape and passed away to the east at a merry nine knots; meanwhile, her leader sat in the crow's-nest, looking at a bright star just above the cape, and wondering if that was his star of destiny which shone so clear.

In honour of this success all hands were turned out and punch, fruit and cigars served in the saloon. Doctor Blessing burst into poetry. Everyone was cheerful, for by rounding Chelyuskin they had probably averted a year's delay.

On 12th September they saw walrus on a floe hard by, and heard them guffawing. It was a lovely morning, and Nansen, who wanted meat, soon had a boat out, with Henriksen, Juell and himself aboard. They cautiously worked their way to leeward of the huge animals, Juell slowly rowing, while Henriksen stood with the harpoon in the bow and Nansen with a gun behind him. Whenever a walrus raised its head they stopped, then stole on again until they were quite close to the great masses of flesh. Suddenly Henriksen fired, but the harpoon struck too high, glanced off the tough hide and went over the backs of the animals. Ten or twelve great, weird faces rose in an instant as the monsters waddled to the edge of the ice to look down at these intruders. Nansen fired and brought one down; again, and another

fell, but jumped into the sea, followed by all the rest. In a moment the boat was surrounded by the wicked heads of the walrus, which bobbed up and down repeatedly. The animals stood up in the water, bellowed and roared and splashed, but did not actually attack it; meanwhile, Nansen shot two more, which Henriksen secured with the harpoon, besides another that sank. Presently the *Fram* came up and the great load of meat was taken on board.

They now sailed away towards the open sea, heading for a point near the New Siberian Islands, not far from the scene of the *Jeannette* disaster; but now there was nothing but clear blue water, with only a little loose ice to be seen, and a dark water-sky ahead. Day after day they hauled northwards, until some optimists believed that they might sail thus easily to the very Pole. But then there came a sudden change. It was 20th September, and they had almost reached 78° N. when the ship was suddenly luffed before the ice-edge; and there lay the polar pack, measureless and compact, shining repellantly through the fog. They followed it for some distance, noting the many birds about; somewhere in the vicinity the inevitable would happen within a very short time now, they would be frozen in, and Nansen could be proven right or wrong.

Meanwhile a minor tragedy engaged everyone's attention; there were bugs on board. Nansen, who detested vermin, at once ordered a great bug war, with the steam hose playing on mattresses, cushions and every other possible hiding-place for the insects. All clothes were put into a barrel, which was sealed, and steam introduced; but the force soon burst it open, the steam rushed out; and the lid was hurled along the deck. Juell tried the old experiment of standing a bug on a piece of wood to see if it would creep northwards, but it refused to move, so they squashed it.

During the next two days they shifted coal up from the hold, a filthy job at which all hands helped with the buckets; while this was going on the ice quietly closed about them and froze them in. Curiously enough, the *Fram* had her head pointing southwards at the time, so that the whole of her drift was stern foremost for two years.

The sun was now so low on the horizon that the temperature fell rapidly. Stage by stage the ship was converted into a winter home; the rudder being hauled up, and the engine taken to pieces, oiled, cleaned and packed away. A joiner's workshop appeared in the hold, a smithy on the deck; for everything, from the most delicate instruments down to rude wooden clogs, could be

made on the *Fram*. They put up a windmill to drive the dynamo and so produce electric light, a task which took two men several weeks; they also had a "horse mill" for achieving the same end by hand, but never had time to use it or needed the exercise. There was always some odd job to be done in connexion with the ship; besides which Amundsen had to make instruments, the sail-maker to make dog harness, everyone to cobble his own shoes. Nansen invented some zinc music sheets for the organ. Scott-Hansen and Johansen had their daily round of scientific observations. Nansen, again, continually ascertained the character of the sea water, sounded and dredged, and examined his finds under the microscope. The doctor, who inspected everyone, had least to do, because nobody fell ill.

They had mainly to thank Nansen's constant attention to their health for this happy state of affairs. They always had potatoes and either green vegetables or macaroni; fresh bread and cakes were baked three times a week; and they lived so well that they all grew fat. Whenever a notable event, such as somebody's birthday, occurred, there were celebrations, with a special menu; on the doctor's the fare included "Pudding de Nordahl" and "Glacé du Greenland" !

Every man had to spend a week in the galley helping the cook, and to wait at table; plenty of others found their way to the fragrant fumes, too, for the galley was the favourite smoking-room. In the evenings there were cards, halma, songs, and music; Nansen playing the organ, or Johansen performing upon the accordion; but at midnight the *Fram* became silent as the grave, except for the tread of the single watchman or the uneasy barking of a dog.

At first the men went out upon the ice unarmed, but one day a bear came up, which gave Scott-Hansen, Johansen and Blessing a fright. They were working in the tent, and on spotting the bear Blessing made off for the ship, but as the bear could run even faster, he returned to the others. They then tried a yell, but the bear still ambled forward, so they ran for it; fortunately bruin had a mind to examine the tent rather than to dine off Norwegians, and while he was so engaged Nansen ran down and shot him dead. Later that winter there was another alarm, when a small young bear actually climbed aboard the *Fram* and killed three dogs. Henriksen, who was walking across the ice with nothing better than a lantern, was the next victim, being knocked down and bitten in the hip; but his shouts for

help were heard and meanwhile he had caught the bear a whack on the head with the lantern. Just then the bear sighted another dog, and was chasing it when a bullet stopped its career. Other bears continually prowled around the ship, although she was seventy miles at least from any land; a trap was set up for them on the ice, baited with pork, but although they sniffed at it they were far too cunning ever to be caught in that way.

Nansen now discovered to his dismay that the last bug war had failed, so he issued new clothes to every man on the ship and hung the old ones in the rigging; this destroyed the enemy, which could not endure up to 60° of frost.

All this while the ship was drifting to and fro with the ice, sometimes going north, sometimes back again towards Chelyuskin, in the most perplexing manner; and it was months before the main trend of the drift showed Nansen's theory to be correct; during this time, his diary naturally betrays his many anxieties. On 9th October a deafening noise outside announced that the autumn pressures had begun. The *Fram* was seized and thrust up between the colliding blocks, only to slip back again safely and easily; and with each such experience their confidence in her

immense strength grew, although no one suspected what was yet in store for her. Four days later the ice was pressing and packing around her, with a noise like thunder, the fractured blocks piling up along her sides until they touched the rigging. The floe split in two; masses of ice ten to fifteen feet thick were hurled about and flung on top of one another like lumps of sugar; but the stout little ship rode easily above it, the only loss being some articles which had been left out on the floe. These squeezes recurred throughout the winter; they alarmed the leader less than the slow progress which was made.

The dogs proved a constant source of trouble. At first they were set free on the ice, but they fought so savagely that four of them were killed, after which Nansen set a watchman over them—usually Johansen—and tied them up. In the middle of October Nansen made another attempt to learn sledge-driving. He harnessed six of the dogs, but they refused to be guided either by trace or whip and tore round and round the ship from one refuse heap to another, hauling Nansen off his feet and dragging him along behind them; while he hung on for dear life, “swearing madly that I would break every bone in their bodies when I got at them.”

The sun disappeared on 20th October, not to return till the middle of February; but the crew worried little about that, having now a good supply of brilliant electric light from the wind-mill; the moon, too, circled round and round weirdly, being visible day and night alike. They were hardy men, living 'tween decks with no fire, as a rule, but only the lamps in the cabins for warmth; Bentzen even went on deck in his shirt and drawers to read the thermometer, in 54° of frost. So the winter passed away pleasantly and quietly. Nansen celebrated Christmas Day by taking a walk, during which he fell through a crack in the ice and got soaked. He often made these solitary rambles, sometimes getting out of sight of the ship, for he keenly felt the mysterious beauty of the silent, frozen sea, its utter peacefulness and freedom from all earthly worries. He even recommends the Arctic as a sanatorium for people with bad nerves!

How fast we fall when once we begin to relax! Nansen, who a few years before had scorned tobacco, now confessed to a liking for cigarettes; then he took to a pipe; and at length we find him mournfully contemplating the last of his cigars!

His solitary rambles were by no means aimless. Although the ship drifted, on the whole, in

the right direction, she moved so slowly that it now appeared as if she would never drift across the Pole. As early as 15th January, 1894, he refers to the idea of getting across to the Pole with dogs and sledges, adding: "It might almost be called an easy expedition for two men." Melville had counted upon a similar march ten years before, but Melville imagined that there would be a chain of islands far to the north, along which depots might be laid. Nansen's proposal was utterly different, and was almost staggering in its boldness; for by "easy" he contemplated a journey of several hundred miles outwards, from a base which would have vanished in the Arctic mists long before he could return; and during both marches the two men would have absolutely nothing to depend upon apart from what they carried on the sledges or what they could shoot. For the present Nansen said nothing of these ideas to the others, although the plan was so constantly in his thoughts that he could not sleep at nights. He even dreamed that he had reached the Pole by sledge and had returned to Franz Josef Land, finding nothing but drift-ice!

Nansen, who foresaw every possibility, was constantly on the look-out for unexpected dangers. The explosives which had been taken to blast a

way out of the ice if needful were now placed in small parcels at different points on the ship: while large quantities of pemmican and bread were packed, so that they could be thrown overboard at a moment's notice. But although the *Fram* underwent some very severe squeezes that winter, the need for drastic action had not yet arisen.

By 2nd February they had passed N. 80° and were still going north. They were now over a deep ocean, a completely unexpected thing; but Nansen managed to make a line two and a quarter miles long, out of a single strand of steel wire. yet he could get no bottom. He then had a still longer line made by unwinding a cable and rewinding two strands together, and thenceforward, by exercising great care, found the bottom repeatedly, usually at about two and a half miles down. This deep sea was thoroughly examined as the ship drifted across it; it was perhaps the most important discovery of the expedition.

Crossing the eightieth parallel had been celebrated by a bottle of beer to each man; but three days later comes this note: "Last day we shall have Ringnes' beer at dinner. Day of mourning". The winter cold up there was so great that the

Fram gave off a mist, while men and dogs could be detected at a distance by the column of vapour above them. When it registered 80° of frost, this extraordinarily hardy man could write, "*Rather* cold, but I did not feel it much." He sometimes became impatient, especially when the drift was southwards, and on one such occasion he remarked: "Should the drift take the wrong direction I will break all the bridges behind me and stake everything on a northward march over the ice. It is unworthy of a man to set himself a task and then give in. There is but one way and that is *fram*, forward!"

With the arrival of spring and the blessed daylight came the clearing of snow from the ship and the revival of outdoor activities; whenever possible now Nansen was out and away to the north, noting the sledging possibilities; Sverdrup guessed the object of these trips, but he too kept his own counsel. Meanwhile, the warm sun melted large pools of fresh water on the ice, in which the men were indulged by rowing exercise and other sports, until a crack accidentally emptied their "tank".

It was so warm that there were pools of water in the slush all round the ship, and the weekly washing hung from the bowsprit gave quite a

homely appearance to the *Fram*, nevertheless a borehole which some of the men made beside her for a bet went down thirty feet through solid ice before it was abandoned.

Constitution Day (17th May) was celebrated in great style, there being a procession on the ice, headed by Nansen with the Norwegian flag; after him came Sverdrup in his dog sledge, bearing the *Fram's* pennant; then the "band"—Johansen with his accordion—followed by the rest of the crew, with much noise and laughter. They marched twice round the ship, after which the leader made a speech from the bridge; little thinking that a day would come when he would make a similar sort of speech to 7000 excited people. Half a dozen shots from the rifles caused the dogs to scamper far away over the ice. A special feast followed, in honour of the day.

The minute oceanic life, which held a great fascination for Nansen, chained him at about this time to his microscope for days on end; and it is very singular that such a man, wedded to a quiet calling, should at the same time be an outstanding athlete. At the very moment when his eye has just left the instrument he writes of his wish "to lay hold of real life, fighting my way over ice and sea, with sledges, boats or kayaks!"

Nansen made a curious prediction, when on 21st August he said that they should all reach home in about two years; for it so happened that the *Fram* arrived at Norway two years afterwards to the very day!

During the autumn all the crew were made to learn ski-ing, so as to be ready for any emergency; six dog sledges and six kayaks were also built to insure against disaster. The monotony of the drift at this time was varied by the appearance of a polar bear, at first on the ice and afterwards on the menu. October 10th being the leader's birthday, he was entertained right royally, with a bottle of the doctor's Norwegian liqueur, and he regretfully opened his last box of cigars; how are the mighty teetotal non-smokers fallen! A few days later there were other things to think about. A furious gale blew the windmill to bits. Then an unfortunate dog licked an iron bolt and its tongue stuck fast to it until Bentzen warmed the bolt.

In mid-November Nansen disclosed to Sverdrup his plans for the polar march, and as the latter agreed, the project was then explained to the whole ship's company. Nansen said that the ship would continue to drift across the ocean, but could not reach the Pole; he therefore proposed

that he himself, with one companion, should make a dash for the prize by dog-sledge, returning across the moving floes either to Franz Josef Land or to Spitsbergen. The ship had shown that she was equal to any strain: Sverdrup was as capable of taking charge as Nansen himself. There was no opposition; on the contrary, the man who had been selected to accompany Nansen was considered fortunate. This man was Johansen, who throughout had done most of the management of the dogs and who proved entirely equal to the tremendous risks which both men ran.

The adventure would not start until March; meantime, days were to come when it appeared likely that it never would start at all. By 12th December the *Fram* had passed $82^{\circ}30'$, the farthest north yet attained by any ship; Christmas found them in 83°N. , and a fortnight later they reached $83^{\circ}34'$, thereby passing the farthest north ever yet attained by man. But at the same time the forces of Nature seemed to be conspiring to crush her, by a terrific demonstration of their resistless strength. A long line of terrifying hummocks formed in front of the ship; the noise of their crashing and grinding made speech impossible at times, and Nansen, who did not

like the look of things, had emergency measures taken, the sledges and other material being put out on the ice. Finally, the *Fram* was caught in the very centre of the pressure. Blocks tumbled up funnel high, crushing down the awning over the deck, and it seemed as if those below would be caught like rats in a trap. Nansen called, "All hands on deck!"—an awkward summons for Sverdrup, who was in the bath at the time. They spent an unforgettable night, sleeping on deck, and ready to leap overboard instantly; but then the *Fram*, which had appeared as if immovably fixed, slipped a little, then a little more, and so freed herself from the danger. This was perhaps the crisis of the voyage. Had she gone down, Nansen would have faced the position with the same calm courage as he faced all the great situations of his career, but the enterprise would have been called a failure. As we all know, the *Fram* did not go down. She went on serenely across the frozen ocean; while her leader, impelled by his own energy and fearlessness, was to add to the story of exploration a feat that has never had a parallel, the march towards the Pole and the grim struggle for life during his four months' retreat.

CHAPTER VI

The Polar March

It requires no ordinary courage to leave the safe and comfortable cabin of a ship for a vagrant life on a frozen ocean, where one is certain to meet not only with endless hummocks and lanes, bitter cold, and the ceaseless annoyance and anxiety of driving a dog-team, but also with the tantalizing wanderings of the floes themselves, which by drifting in the wrong direction may nullify the whole day's march. Yet this was what Nansen and Johansen now had to face, the leader at least knowing perfectly well what to expect—no mercy and very little good fortune; they went they knew not whither and were to return they knew not how, but with brave faces and a hearty good-bye they left their comrades some seven miles north of the *Fram*, on the morning of 14th March, after two false starts, and quietly disappeared into the unknown. The ship, of course, drifted on; where they would next encounter her, if at all, nobody could say.

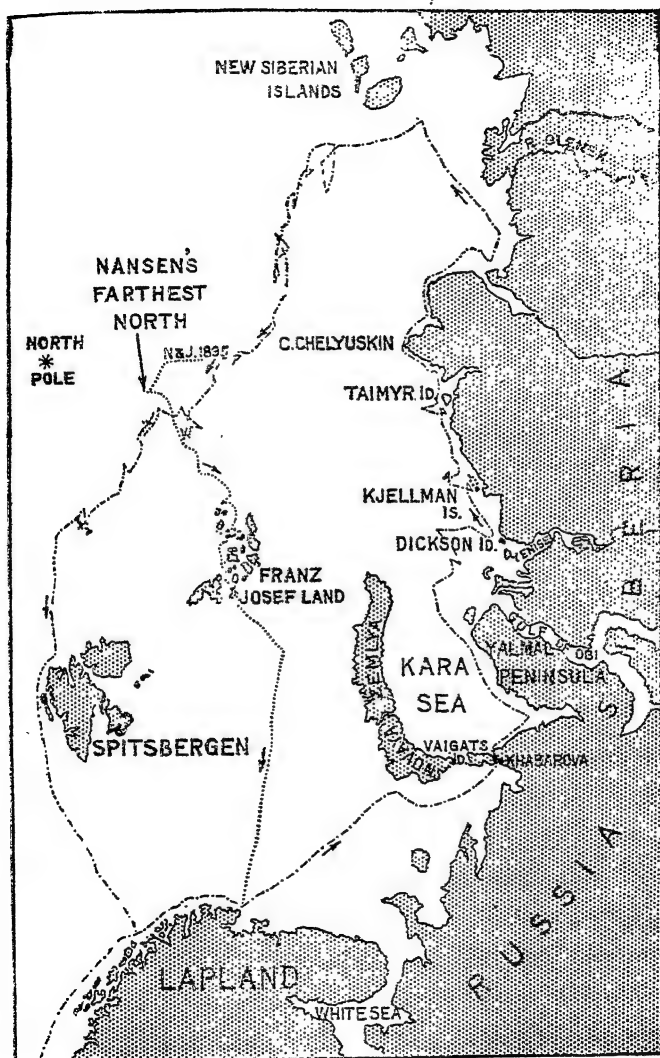
At first their progress was not too bad. Nansen went ahead as a rule, to pick out a route; his dogs followed willingly enough until some obstacle arose, when they would lie down and wait for him to come back and fetch them. Johansen followed with the other two sledges; and the crack of his whip and the sound of his voice echoed continually across the silent and deserted snowscape. The floes formed large expanses of comparatively flat ice, but at short distances ridges arose where the edges had been crushed together, making a chaos of sharp-edged blocks on which the two men bruised their limbs and the contents of the sledges were repeatedly torn. Sometimes it was possible to drive the sledges across, but more often they had to be forced over by main strength, or even carried across bodily, the dogs meanwhile doing their best to make matters worse by twisting the traces into knots; occasionally there was an upset, followed by much exertion and bad temper while the driver turned the sledge right side up again. And, of course, all this incessant toil never slackened; there was no joy in life for either man, but the morning and evening meals, and the hours of broken slumber in their half-frozen bags; but they got on, and that was the main thing, each day's march of

ten to twelve miles taking them farther towards their goal. It was still bitterly cold, with night temperatures of 70 or even 75 degrees of frost. Their woollen clothes became saturated with moisture which froze immediately into a rattling and crackling cuirass of ice; the only way to get rid of this was to thaw them on the body at night; they never *dried* throughout the five months' march. That any two men could stand such conditions for 150 days on end, followed by a winter spent in a condition little better than that of savages, seems almost incredible; but it was so.

Minor accidents were common. One day the sack of fish flour was accidentally ripped open and the powdered food scattered in a trail along the ice; it was too precious to lose and had to be carefully scraped up again. Then they lost their sledge-meter after only a week's use, so that henceforward the length of the march could only be roughly estimated. The work of taking observations to ascertain their position, of cooking breakfast, of relashing the loads, harnessing the dogs, &c., consumed precious hours each morning, for under those frigid conditions everything takes twice as long as normally; there were bright moments, on the other hand, and one day they actually covered twenty-one miles.

But now the ice became worse; and sometimes both men were so exhausted as evening drew on that they stumbled forward in the snow, half-asleep, and were only recalled to consciousness by the jolt. Camp was always pitched behind hummocks, so as to give some protection from the bitter wind. While Johansen looked after the dogs Nansen pitched the tent and lighted the stove; this was the moment for which they had both been waiting all day, when the aroma of steaming food seemed delicious beyond words, and there was relief from the toil and strain of the march at last. Meanwhile, they had to crawl into the bags so as to thaw their frozen clothes; and after all, were sometimes so tired that they spilt the supper, or fell asleep with the food in their hands. By way of luxury, Nansen had devised a drink of hot water in which a little whey powder was dissolved; "we thought it wonderfully comforting", he says. The sleeve of his coat became so stiff that it wore a deep sore on the wrist, which became frost-bitten, eating down almost to the bone; and although he bound it up carefully, it was late in the summer before it healed.

Still more disagreeable work started on 23rd March, when the first dog had to be killed to



NANSEN'S GREAT POLAR JOURNEY

provide food for the rest. Many of the animals would not touch the meat at first, but as the weeks passed and they became more famished, their wolfish instincts got the better of them, and they ravenously tore to pieces the smoking bodies of their late companions. It was horrible work killing them, but it had to be done. Nansen, who loved dogs, owned to moments of bitter self-reproach when he thought of the beatings, the cruelty, and the slaughter of these unfortunate creatures; but there was no other means of transport except man-hauling, in which he never believed except as a last resource. One becomes hardened to such things, just as a soldier becomes hardened to killing his foes; but to the English mind there is nothing finer than the sledging methods of M'Clintock and Captain Scott, who managed for the most part to do without dogs, hauling their heavy loads by manpower alone.

As the days passed, difficulties thickened. Nansen had counted upon a northward march of fifty days before turning back, but less than a month elapsed before matters came to a crisis. On 29th March, while they were slowly grinding northwards, they were stopped by ridge after ridge of shattered ice, the dogs had lost a good

deal of their strength, and the men were compelled to do much of the work themselves. The current also robbed them of many a hard-earned mile, for it was now setting strongly to the west, and you can see from the map how they had to alter their course in the effort to counter it. This day, at a crack in the ice about twelve feet deep, all the dogs belonging to the first sledge fell in; imagine the difficulty of hauling them out again, snapping and yelping, and with their traces frightfully intertwined! At the same obstacle the next sledge fell in bodily, nor could they get it out again until everything had been unpacked. To crown all, when they camped that night the stove refused to work, and it was five o'clock next morning before "supper" was ready.

One would scarcely expect to find lanes of open water up there near the Pole; but they are only too common, as both Peary and the recent Russian travellers found. One such lane opened silently while Nansen was on one side and Johansen on the other. The leader had the tent, but poor Johansen, who had fallen in and was soaked, had no protection; but after a long walk they found a way across. At other times lanes were crossed by means of the trembling and swaying fragments that floated in the sea; it was like driving across

rocks with nothing underneath them. At these treacherous places both men fell in repeatedly and got wet, a serious matter when there was no means of drying oneself.

One night Nansen was so tired that he fell asleep with his dinner in his hand and dreamed that it was Christmas Day and he was a guest at a table whereon there smoked a rich fat goose; then he stumbled in the snow and woke up, to find himself inside the frozen sleeping-bag! On another occasion they both let their watches run down, but happily it was found out almost at once. Progress had now been reduced to a crawl; on 5th April they gained only four miles. To continue thus was futile. On the 8th, just a month and a day after leaving the *Fram*, Nansen decided to turn back. They had covered about 260 miles, and had reached $86^{\circ}13'$, a spot nearer to the Pole by whole degrees than anyone had ever attained before.

As soon as they turned the conditions improved, although it was not long before their arch-enemy the current began again to steal miles, for this time it was drifting the floes northwards against them. Day after day they made good progress, heading for the icebound and uninhabited, not to say unmapped and unknown islands which are

collectively called Franz Josef Land; at the southern end of this region an English expedition was working, while in any event a practicable route to Spitsbergen lay across the sea to its west. But on 12th April came an accident which well-nigh proved disastrous; for they let both watches run down and this time could only reset them by pure guesswork, having overslept for hours. It is by a specially rated watch, or chronometer, that the traveller can most certainly find his longitude; but at the Pole of course all longitude lines run to a point; and if, through uncertainty as to time, Nansen and Johansen should select the wrong course, what was an error of perhaps only a mile or so in their high latitude, would lead them enormously astray as they went south. Nevertheless, they had to make the best of it, and for a long while steered south by compass.

Meanwhile, the sun shone brilliantly, day and night, making the heat "almost oppressive", although in the shade it was still far below freezing-point, and once Nansen, who had been forced to go far back along the route for some forgotten goods, returned to the sledges to find Johansen seated on a kayak fast asleep, basking in the sun. They had now got back to the latitude in which the *Fram* was drifting; but there was no sign of

the ship. Hereabouts they found a great piece of Siberian larch sticking up through the ice; Johansen carved their initials on it, "F.N., H.J., 85°30' N."

Occasionally their progress to land was remarkably good, despite their worn-out dogs; in two days they gained forty miles. But the dogs were perishing fast; and at the back of Nansen's mind was ever the question, "Are we marching in the right direction?" a question that became more urgent as day after day elapsed and still there was no trace of the expected land. He became obsessed by the idea that the drift of the ice (an incalculable factor) was carrying them too far to the west, and he altered his course to suit; actually this proved to be a costly mistake, for they were almost dead on their objective, and the error would have cost less determined men their lives.

The first sign of life they encountered was the tracks of foxes; but it was nearly a month later before they spotted a bird overhead, flying serenely and easily while they, poor wretches, had to stumble and slither in the slush. Broad lanes of blue water lay mockingly right across the route, with no end visible in either direction. The dogs could pull no longer; indeed, the evil day was

not far distant when they would have no dogs at all. And meantime the rations were falling, while summer and a hopeless sludgy surface approached only too fast. "I am so tired," wrote Nansen, in his diary on 3rd May, "that when I fall down I only wish to lie there, to save myself the trouble of getting up again."

As their anxieties deepened they pressed on more resolutely than ever, even through blinding snowstorms and the dense grey mists. They ran right into high ice-mounds before they could pull up, and they tumbled into holes or shot across cracks without seeing them till the danger was past. Where the lanes were filled with rubbly blocks of ice and pools of water they sometimes sank to the thighs, an exhausting and desperate mode of getting along, but they did get along, in Nansen's famous phrase, "somehow". Day after day he climbed indefatigably to the summits of the ridges, but never a glimpse could he get of the expected land. What had really occurred was that they had come down six degrees too far to the east, on the Siberian side of the islands; and they might have continued until they were completely stopped, or until they reached the equally impracticable tundra, but for subsequent accidents.

The end of May, nearly two months after the turn, found them still pushing on for their lives, across miserable one-year floes only two to three feet thick, which drifted hither and thither with the wind; across these they had to scramble as best they could, often waiting a long time for the lanes to close. Seals, birds, whales even, were seen out at sea, but no land; in a few days the surface would become utterly impassable, and there now remained only seven worn-out dogs.

Nansen now decided to pitch camp on a floe which was drifting in the open sea and patch the kayaks, which had been sadly battered during the many accidents of the journey; with them at least one could hunt seals and get off this hateful ice. It was Whit-Sunday, 2nd June, and the job took them a week, during much of which sleet, snow and once even rain, came down. As every ounce of material was valuable, all the lashings of the kayaks had to be unwound and then used again, no pleasant job in that weather, with cold fingers. Meanwhile, a gull was shot, but ammunition too must be husbanded and not wasted on such poor fare; so Nansen cut down the rations.

At last they got away again, 8th June, taking bread for forty days and butter for three weeks. The start was terrifying. Snow had fallen heavily

and it stuck to the sledge runners like paste; a snow-storm was raging; but the indomitable pair pushed on just the same. At the lanes Nansen often had to make long walks in order to find a crossing, and at such times Johansen sometimes had the uncomfortable feeling that he had fallen in and was drowned. Day after day they marched in dense mist and sloppy snow, crossing innumerable sea channels; while a cold south-west wind blew straight in their faces and even tormented them at night by tugging at the tent walls, which were threadbare enough already. The sledges often sank deep in mud; their drivers were in it up to the knees. "There are moments," wrote Nansen, "when it seems impossible that any creature not possessed of wings could get farther." On 10th June they made only three or four miles, on the 11th barely a mile; and as they were fighting for their lives this speaks for itself. Time after time the sledges broke through the thin crust into loose snow beneath and were then immovable until lifted out again. On the 12th the two heroes rested; even so, they made only two miles next day; and, of course, in their thoughts ran the uncomfortable reflection, How long will our stock of food last now? The 14th was the worst day of all, the sledges sticking "as if glued to the spot".

An observation proved now that all this time the drift had been carrying them away from the land, and they were actually farther north than they had been ten days earlier. No matter, they must try again, even though they had only three dogs left, and none of those could pull; out of the harness of the dead ones they made haulage gear for themselves.

They now began to miss dinner each day, so as to save a meal, and were glad to use dog's blood for porridge. They were pretty well played out themselves; for on the 18th Nansen fired at a couple of seals in the sea and missed them both. After that, breakfast and supper were reduced as well.

Realizing that it was no use to continue in this way exhausting themselves to no purpose, Nansen decided to encamp and wait for better times, or until the opening sea made it practicable to use their kayaks. Three days later, the tide against which they had battled so manfully and so long turned at last in their favour. A seal rose near the kayaks. Johansen promptly shot it, Nansen harpooned it, and the spectre of starvation was banished for a month at least; moreover, the enforced rest enabled both men to recuperate their strength.

It was now decided to abandon many things, including even the sleeping-bags, so as to lighten the loads on the kayaks. The two kayaks were floated side by side, and tied together with skis as bracing. The loaded sledges were then run across them, one fore and one aft; the dogs sprang aboard, the men stepped into their narrow openings; and in this Crusoe-like outfit they took to the blue water. Although the sledge ends fouled the paddles they got along "somehow", and thought it far better than trudging over that dreadful snow. Just as they were landing again, with one half of the "boat" out of the water, they spotted a huge bearded seal; the chance was too good to lose, so Johansen shot and Nansen harpooned it. Meanwhile, however, the sledge slipped back, Johansen's kayak was disappearing beneath the sea, and several articles, including their precious cooker, broke adrift and floated off in the breeze. Nansen, who had been hanging on to the seal, now let go, seized the kayak, pulled it up, and then caught the seal again before it sank! Between them they then hauled the animal on to the ice; the cooker was retrieved, and although their belongings were soaked and the bread was pulpy with sea water, they regarded a whole seal as well worth it.

Camp was kept at this spot for many days, while the leaky kayaks were repaired; meanwhile seal steaks fried in blubber, and blood pancakes, sent an appetizing aroma around, although the smoke from the burning fat caused their eyes to smart and their skins to blacken. One day the oil in the stove caught fire, the tent was filled with suffocating smoke, and Nansen only made things worse by hurling a handful of snow upon it; for the burning fat then spread all over the tent, and besides other damage burnt a great hole in the roof. Both men ran outside, "glad to have escaped with our lives". This was the third time that Nansen had been involved in a fire.

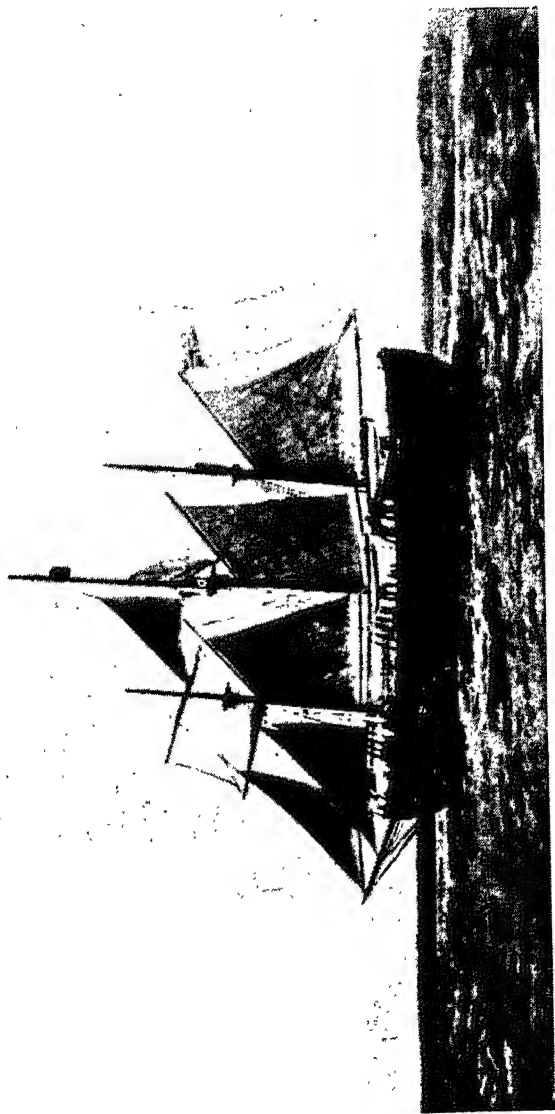
He now shot another seal, although his leaking kayak was sinking beneath him, and with that success all fear of food shortage vanished for a long time. But the two "grim, black, soot-stained barbarians", as Nansen describes them, were by no means out of the wood, or rather off the ice. It was necessary to paint the kayaks, but, of course, they had no material; so Nansen burnt bones for many days, pounding them together and mixing the dust with train-oil. In his own words, the result was "perfectly useless". He then smoked the place out repeatedly, so that he could

scrape away enough soot to make a mixture; and this extraordinary paint seems to have served its purpose. Outside it was raining incessantly, and they hoped that this would wash some of the sludge away, leaving ice upon which they could march. While they were at this place a bear came up to the tent and sniffed at one of the two remaining dogs. Nansen promptly shot it through the shoulder and chest, but it made off, followed by two cubs; he followed them and after a long chase shot the lot. They now had bearskins to lie upon and felt themselves in luxury, besides the joy of eating bear meat morning, noon and night.

After more than three weeks at this floating camp they started off once more to find the land (22nd July); actually it had been visible to them many times, but they always mistook it for clouds or icebergs. In order to sail more easily, the sleeping-bags and tent were abandoned, likewise the three bearskins, some snowshoes and many other articles; for life itself depended upon their reaching land promptly. On 24th July they clearly saw it, a black streak on the horizon. They expected to reach it next day, but were doomed to bitter disappointment. The floes drifted away with them, and it was impossible to launch the kayaks in water, which was filled with fragments

of ice. Then Nansen went down with lumbago, and while he was ill they drifted still farther away. But on 1st August they started once more, and after almost incredible difficulties, tumbling into the pools, hindered by mist and lanes, they at length descried the ice edge ahead. Nansen had just ferried the craft across a lane, and was hauling it up, when he heard a shout, "Take a gun!" He turned, to find Johansen prone on his back, with an enormous bear standing over him; it had knocked him down, but he was holding its throat. Nansen dashed for the weapon, but the kayak slipped into the water, and while he was hauling it up again Johansen said, "You must look sharp if you want to be in time." Fortunately, the bear let him go, in order to attack one of the dogs; and at that instant Nansen, who was not two yards away, shot it behind the ear, and it fell down dead.

Next day, the 6th August, after five months upon the frozen ocean, they stood at the edge of the open water; so great was the relief that Johansen shouted, "Hurrah!" There lay the land in the distance, not very inviting, because a glacier cliff fringed it everywhere; but still it was land, and that was something to be thankful for. Up went the sail and out went the kayaks; first,



Nansen's ship the "Fram"

however, they had the unhappy task of shooting each other's last dog, since it was impossible to take them any farther. The little craft sailed along beneath the glacier, without finding any landing. That night they slept on a floe, and the next, and the one after that; paddling by means of ski staffs with broken skis as blades, and sailing too.

Mist hung over the region relentlessly, grey, wet, clinging mist; but they pushed on among what appeared to be islands, being by no means certain where they were, although it was actually the beginning of Franz Josef Land. Walrus now appeared in the sea, and, one of them attacking the kayaks, Johansen shot it. Some hours afterwards another walrus struck them from below and Johansen jumped into the air; this time Nansen shot it, and after cutting off sufficient flesh and blubber for present needs they continued the voyage. The fog now lifting, they perceived a chain of islands running far to the south; through this lay their way. And then at last the miracle happened; and land—real land, with earth, and runnels of fresh water, and patches of golden-brown moss, and beautiful yellow poppies, stood beneath their feet, the first land they had trodden for two years. It was 15th August, a day that could not be allowed to pass without

a feast from the *Fram's* few remaining stores.

While they were sailing among these islands, a sudden storm came up, and the ice floes were blown firmly against the shore, forming a solid barrier that boded ill for their prospects. To make matters easier for both of them, Nansen had now sawn the sledges in half, so that each could take a single kayak, and just before this storm burst a huge ox walrus attacked each craft alternately; they did not want to waste a bullet on it, so they took refuge on the nearest floe, the walrus swimming round and round while they had dinner. Then came the storm; and now once more they were on the hated ice, with dwindling supplies and the land unattainable again. While they were wondering how to increase their larder an enormous bear came up and looked at the tent. Nansen shot it through the middle of the chest, and bear steak once more became the chief item on their menu.

It was now clear that they would have to winter in this inhospitable place, without a hut, proper food or equipment, with clothes torn and footgear worn out. If, as Nansen now believed, they had reached Franz Josef Land, there was an English hut 150 miles away, a distance that they could not risk covering before the winter set in. Some-

where hereabouts, then. they must build themselves a home and shoot enough bears and seals to keep them for nine months in meat and fuel.

On 24th August the ice opened again between their camp and the land; the floe drifted out to sea, and they had the utmost difficulty to launch the kayaks in the heavy sea. When at last they were afloat the land was eight or ten miles distant: then ensued a fierce struggle to gain the shore, in which they won only with the aid of a sail. They paddled up a fjord until they found a likely spot for wintering, with a little patch of beach, and above it an immense basalt cliff. Overhead were thousands of ivory gulls, kittiwakes, burgo-masters, and skua gulls; the sea promised better food still. They had scarcely landed when a bear followed them; they hid behind the kayaks, and Johansen shot it. Then it was the turn of walrus, next of seals. While they were building a winter home they had to have some shelter above their heads, for by this time the tent was useless except as a sail. They therefore dug out stones with a sledge runner, and made a hut or den—a dreadful little place, so small that when Nansen lay down in it his feet stuck out of the door; yet in this hovel, exposed to every draught, they lay on the bearskins, with a potful of hot meat and a

smoking train-oil lamp, and thought life enjoyable.

During the intervals of hunting bears and walrus they now began to build the main hut, everything having to be improvised from their meagre resources. They made a spade out of a walrus's shoulder-blade tied to a broken ski stick, and a mattock out of a walrus tusk tied to the cross-tree of a sledge. For a space of ten feet by six the ground was dug three feet down, and stone walls were then built to three feet above it, the chinks being filled in with moss and earth. It was decidedly cold, and the frozen walrus hides had to be hammered into shape and even thawed in the sea, before they could be sufficiently bent to lay over a drift log and provide a roof. Within the hut were stone benches for each man; the door, at the end of a little tunnel, was roofed by snow-blocks in the Eskimo fashion. Unfortunately, the ground froze before the floor could be completed, so that underneath the blankets and bearskin which formed their bed sundry rough, sharp stones bruised the anatomy of both men throughout the winter. For light they used lamps made of German silver from the sledge runners, the wick being picked out of bandages from the medicine chest. As their spirit had all gone, they employed train-oil from blubber. It gave a good

heat but coated everything in soot and grease; this proved a serious handicap, because they had no means of washing other than the friction of moss and sand, and their greasy clothes stuck to them and created nasty sores. In one corner of the hut was a little hearth, with a bearskin chimney-board leading to a hole in the walrus-skin roof; and above that was an ice chimney which constantly melted away and had as constantly to be renewed. In this charming home, where they never got the temperature much above freezing-point, Nansen and Johansen lived for almost nine months.

Their food was boiled bear and bear soup in the morning, fried bear steak and occasionally also fried blubber at night; they relished it, grew fat upon it, and never once fell ill throughout their confinement. The depot of meat and other stores was kept outside, being loaded with stones; but foxes visited the spot repeatedly and took away everything that they could get at, including bamboos, wire, harpoons, Nansen's collection of stones and mosses, a ball of twine and a thermometer. Once a fox was so annoyed when Nansen disturbed it that it sat down and howled at him until he drove it away with stones!

On 15th October the long winter began, storms

of snow and violent gales being varied by still, peaceful nights when the moon showed everything up in sickly greenish-white light and the aurora flashed its mysterious rays across the dark sky. Nansen and Johansen kept indoors as much as possible, for their clothes were too thin now to withstand the bitter winds which howled outside; but every day they took a run for exercise, besides such necessary tasks as reading the outdoor thermometers, &c. For the most part they sat and slept, talked and cooked, in the gloom of their little home; while the gales howled and blustered against the walls without doing the slightest damage, although one gust carried Johansen's kayak some hundreds of feet along the beach. Each man acted as cook for a week, which of course served for a useful calendar, to mark their progress towards the wished-for spring.

Christmas Day was celebrated by cleaning out the hut, and by a change of linen, i.e. each man put his outer shirt next to his skin and his inner one outside. The day itself was calm and peaceful, with a wonderful aurora. While the pair ate a part of their *Fram* provisions, they pictured to each other how nice it would be to enjoy all the luxuries that their friends were having at home; this, in fact, was a frequent topic of con-

versation. Cakes, potatoes, fresh bread, clean clothes, soap, and a bath, were some of the greatest objects of their ambition: "We would sit up in our bag for hours and talk of all these things", says Nansen.

Early in March, when their food had begun to run low again, a bear was heard nosing about outside: Johansen shot at it blindly from the doorway, and after a long chase they killed it. "We lived on that bear for six weeks." On 2nd April they shot another; there was no fear of starvation so long as the ammunition held out. As the spring drew near they tried to improve their personal appearance by making new clothes out of the blankets, with bearskin socks and gloves, and walrus hide on their shoes; as the foxes had stolen the thread, cotton was provided by unravelling some of the provision bags. Both men thought the result quite good; at least it served its purpose.

Nansen's plan was to sail the kayaks across to Spitsbergen, where he knew that a ship could be found; imagine the boldness of trusting oneself in those battered craft, which were coated with home-made paint, in the stormy and ice-flecked northern ocean! For food they would have to depend entirely upon their rifles, because they

found that most of the *Fram's* remaining supplies had become mouldy and useless. Weeks passed in preparing for a fresh start, and here again everything had to be made out of something else which had originally served quite a different purpose. The tent was the worst difficulty, for it had been torn to shreds by the foxes. A cover was provided, however, by slinging the sails across a framework of sledges and kayaks, the whole fastened down by snow. As there now remained only two half-sledges, the kayaks had to be very carefully loaded upon them and were protected by bearskins. With this scrappy equipment the indomitable pair started forth, 19th May, 1896, to renew their adventures.

At first the marches were short, both men being out of condition; nevertheless, they soon proved exciting, for before long Nansen fell into a crack unseen by his companion; he had no means of getting out, and the sea had risen to his chest and would have drowned him had not Johansen arrived at the last moment. Then they fell foul of their old enemies the walrus, but escaped unharmed. All this while they were working southwards among the islands of Franz Josef Land, partly on thin ice, partly on the sea. Heavy storms held them up for many days, but

the real crisis of the journey had yet to come.

It was 12th June. They had landed from a spell in the kayaks, and the two craft, tied together, were moored to the ice-edge; when Johansen, happening to glance round, exclaimed, "I say, the kayaks are adrift!" So they were, and with everything on board; "we had not even a knife", wrote Nansen, afterwards. Nansen at once gave Johansen his watch, took off some clothes, sprang into the icy water and swam away; but the wind had drifted the kayaks offshore, and it was touch and go whether he would reach them. When he became tired he swam on his back. Closer and closer he approached, and despite his stiffening limbs swung a leg aboard and managed to tumble in; but he was so cold that for a time he could not hold the paddle. The watching Johansen's state of mind can be imagined. As soon as Nansen had recovered somewhat he managed to paddle back to the ice, but now he could scarcely stand. He was packed at once into the sleeping-bag, where he lay shivering for a long time until the warmth returned.

When they continued they rowed among innumerable walrus, two of which were shot for food. The day was misty, and the weird heads of the monsters kept popping up all around. One

suddenly appeared beside the kayaks and, laying its huge flipper across Nansen's frail craft, tried to upset it. He struck it across the head with his paddle, when it disappeared, having made a rent in the kayak that almost sank it.

On 17th June, while Johansen was in camp, Nansen went for a walk along the shore and fancied that he heard the barking of a dog. He shouted to Johansen, who had heard it too. Lest their imagination had been playing tricks, Nansen went on to explore, while Johansen remained behind at the tent. Suddenly Nansen heard a cry, and a man walked across the ice towards him; a white man, clean, warmly clad, and speaking cultured English. What he must have thought of the tall, grimy and greasy barbarian before him Nansen never learned. But they waved their hats to each other, and then he recognized the stranger as Mr. Frederick G. Jackson, whom he had met in London; he was the leader of the Jackson-Harmsworth Expedition, which had been mapping this desolate land and had spent the winter at Cape Flora, near by. Jackson hurried him away. Willing helpers brought in Johansen. There were congratulations and jokes, good food, good drink, real soup, and a bed, all luxuries beyond belief. The great adventure was over.

CHAPTER VII

Science and Politics

The successful termination of the sledge journey brought Fridtjof Nansen to the high-water mark of success, but he still had to wait many a weary day before reaping his reward; for the ship of his English friends, the *Windward*, was so seriously delayed by ice that winter loomed ahead with every prospect of another year in the Arctic. At this Nansen and Johansen rebelled, even thinking of sailing alone to Spitsbergen rather than leave their families in suspense for so long. But on 26th July Nansen was hauled out of bed, to descry through the door the delightful sight of a ship's rigging; it was the *Windward*, and both parties now went back in her. At the first port of call, Vardo, which was also the last Norwegian town he had left, Nansen went ashore, and telegrams were presently flashing all over the world with the news that one who had been given up for dead had returned. Here, too, was the yacht *Otaria* belonging to an old friend, Sir George

Baden-Powell; and by the latter's invitation the two went aboard. They sailed a little way down the coast to Hammerfest, where the explorers received the best news of all, a telegram from Sverdrup stating that the *Fram* had just reached Tromsøe, with everyone safe and well; so great and happy a coincidence has rarely happened in the history of travel. Next day the *Otaria* put into Tromsøe Harbour, and there was the beloved ship, as sound and storm-proof as on the day she had sailed, with all the well-known faces wreathed in smiles.

Nansen having rejoined his ship, their farther progress to the capital became nothing but a procession. Of course they stopped at Laurvik, beside the shipyard which had seen the *Fram's* birth: and there they took aboard two good friends of the explorer, Sir Clements Markham and Dr. J. Scott Keltie, who were bound for Christiania as England's representatives in the gathering to officially welcome Nansen home. Next day the *Fram* slowly steamed up the well-known channel, a line of steamers, sailing ships, fishing ships, Government gunboats, craft of every description, on either side; and as she passed they fell in behind. At the Christiania Quay, amid the blare of bands, the firing of guns, and the

hurrahs of many thousands of people, Nansen and his men landed in state, like princes returning from a successful war. The city held high holiday, for the deeds of Nansen had fired the public imagination like those of the heroes of old. The Geographical Society held a banquet to the forty foreign delegates. "It began at half-past four," said Scott Keltie. "Sir Clements and I left at one in the morning. I don't know when they broke up." Next day Nansen dined with the king and came away with the Order of St. Olaf on his breast.

These rejoicings, these honours, are natural. It is but right that we should do all we can to welcome home those who, on account of science, or of their country, or even from the mere spirit of adventure, have dared much and suffered more. As a rule, the affair is soon forgotten; many things are happening in the world, and what is news to-day is ancient history to-morrow. But the case of Nansen was different. He became the hero *par excellence* of the youth of his age: his peculiar personality, his marvellous strength and resourcefulness, and the extraordinary nature of his adventures, won him a place which was never afterwards lost. Even in remote Siberia, fifteen years afterwards, people who could not even

speaking his language demanded to hear from him the story of the *Fram*. No explorer of modern times ever gained so great a hold upon our hearts, except perhaps Robert Falcon Scott.

To be a lion, and especially a social lion, one must roar; and Nansen detested roaring. Nevertheless, the long programme of banquets, speeches and presentations, the visits from people "who really must see that Doctor Nansen", the autograph fiends, reporters, and other people who live by collecting things or selling news, all had to be endured. In this he did his part, as ever, worthily; but retiring to his beloved home at Lysaker, with the forest behind and the lights of the fjord ahead, on every possible occasion. One ceremony, however, touched him to the heart; it was a procession of 20,000 school children, led by the national poet and statesman Bjornsen, who was a man after Nansen's own heart and a hero-worshipper of the worst kind.

Nansen was offered, and accepted, the Professorship of Zoology at Christiania University; but first the aftermath of the famous voyage had to be disposed of. He began at once a popular account of the journey; it appeared in 1897, as *Farthest North*, a brilliant book, full of dramatic incidents and told in the plainest way;

but the intimate glimpses of his own mystical nature and his innermost thoughts are somewhat distasteful to English readers who have been taught to conceal their feelings.

A long series of lectures abroad followed, which brought funds into Nansen's exchequer and many honours to himself. He began in England, where 7000 people greeted him at the Royal Albert Hall on 8th February, 1897, the Prince of Wales and Duke of York (afterwards King Edward VII and King George V) both being on the platform. His staunch friend, Sir Clements Markham, patron saint of Arctic and Peruvian travellers, presided; M'Clintock, Nares, the President of the Royal Society, several foreign ambassadors, and other distinguished men, supported him. Nansen met with the reception of a prince. He spoke for one and a half hours without a note, the lecture being partly illustrated from his own graphic sketches. Afterwards the President said: "I for one never doubted that he would return and that he would return successful. His great ability and resourcefulness, his great scientific knowledge, his marvellous powers of endurance, above all, those high qualities by which he made himself beloved by all his followers, were the guarantees of that success." Sir George Nares,

handsomely retracting his former doubts, said that "of Nansen none but himself could be his parallel." The Prince, in a few well-chosen words, presented him with a special gold medal and a similar medal, in silver, to Scott-Hansen, who was also present.

One month later Nansen outlined to the same Society, but in a less excited atmosphere, the scientific results of the voyage, upon which his ultimate fame must rest; and now was seen for the first time the great amount of solid work that had been accomplished on the drifting *Fram*. Meanwhile, Nansen had been lecturing all over England. At Cambridge he received an honorary D.Sc.

Here is a very unusual thing. The British Government also recognized him, by presenting him with a set of the "*Challenger Reports*"—a unique gift, most valuable to a marine biologist like himself, and in money alone worth some £150. But perhaps he valued more highly still a specially bound set of Arctic voyages from the veterans of the Franklin search; nobody contributed to it who had not himself spent at least one winter in the Arctic.

Then came the turn of France, where he was received with equal enthusiasm. His reception

at Rouen was afterwards described as "the great day" of the local Geographical Society. At Paris he lectured to 6000 people, was received by the President of France, and was given the insignia of Commander of the Legion of Honour. By the beginning of April he had reached Germany, where he lunched with the Emperor, from whom he received the Humboldt Medal—an extremely rare distinction, which had hitherto been bestowed only on two foreign travellers—Prjevalsky, the Russian explorer of central Asia, and Sir John Murray, of *Challenger* fame. Then came Copenhagen's turn, where again he was received by the king. To a mind like Nansen's, which was ever keenly alive to opposites, the contrast of this honour and the head-shaking and doubts before he started, must have acted as a sobering influence.

He returned home, to quiet labour, as he imagined; but found instead mountains of work—old enterprises that must be finished, new ones to be begun, tutorial duties, politics, which almost overwhelmed him. For "Master Irresponsible", as he loved to consider himself, had now come to hold a very high responsibility indeed; and that science of zoology which he had so light-heartedly taken up, because it offered prospects of sport and

open-air life, was, as years rolled by, to chain him ever more firmly to the lectern, the microscope, the drawing-board and the printer's proof. On top of this, his natural calling, were many other activities which, once having taken up, he would never let go.

He wrote a good deal. The most important book of those years was *The Scientific Results of the "Fram's" Voyage*. It came out in six volumes (1900—6), containing the final verdict of various eminent scientists on the currents, physics of the sea, marine life, and so on; and it is Nansen's greatest title to permanent scientific fame. His own report on the Polar Ocean was well described by a keen critic as the most important contribution to oceanography since the *Challenger's*—no mean praise. Throughout these books Nansen tests his own conclusions ruthlessly; which is the ideal of a scientific mind, never allowing anything from itself to be taken on trust.

Of course he was frequently asked for advice on some exploratory project or other; such advice was never withheld. On 24th February, 1898, he came over to England again, to a special meeting of the Royal Society concerning the proposed National Antarctic Expedition; he took part in the discussion, thinking—wrongly, as it trans-

pired—that Antarctica might be nothing but groups of islands. He himself had been advised to turn his energies to that quarter; but although he toyed with the idea he could never make up his mind to abandon his wife and family again, as we shall see later. Two years later we find him in the wide streets of the Norwegian capital, accompanied by Markham and Scott, helping them to find the best sledge-makers, and giving them the fullest information as to his own equipment and methods. In June, 1898, he took pleasure in fathering Sverdrup's project to borrow the *Fram* from the Norwegian Government and take her round Greenland; and at a farewell dinner before she sailed he spoke a few touching words about Sverdrup's fine character and his old comrades of the far north.

We must not imagine, however, that Nansen had "settled down"; in one sense he never settled down to the end of his life, but on the contrary became more and more wedded to the sea. His latest interest was that vast expanse of deep and stormy ocean which lies between the fjords of Norway, the iron coasts of Iceland and the glaciers of Greenland, in which his countrymen daily and hourly risked their lives. Norway is not a rich country. Its greatest resources are

its timber and its fisheries; and Nansen, who loved every turn of every fjord, took the greatest interest in both industries, but particularly in the fisheries. During his youth a number of eminent scientists, whom he afterwards met continually in one capacity or another—his mentor, Robert Collett, Mohn, Pettersson of Stockholm, and others—had been trying to make systematic studies of this large sea, so as to find out why fish were abundant in some years and scarce in others; what changes occurred in the currents, in the warmth of the water, in the minute life, in anything, in a word, which might explain the vagaries of a fish's life-story. The other maritime countries of north-west Europe—England, Denmark, Germany, Finland—were similarly engaged, but each on its own. As far back as 1895 it had been suggested that this work should be co-ordinated; and now (June, 1899) an international conference was held at Stockholm to discuss joint action. Nansen and a promising young scientist, Dr. Johann Hjort, represented Norway. It was agreed to establish a central office and bureau, also a laboratory at which instruments could be tested and studies carried on, and the delegates departed to stir up their respective governments. Small though she was,

Norway promptly built a special fishery research steamer, the *Michael Sars*; the laboratory was also set up, in Christiania, Nansen being made its director. Russia and Germany likewise built special steamers; Great Britain expressed her goodwill. At a second conference between the same eight nations, which was held at Christiania in May, 1901, Nansen again represented Norway. It was there decided to form an International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, a body of which most people have never heard, but which has done invaluable research work in marine fisheries ever since it began to function in 1902; except during the Great War, when of course it was paralysed. This body owes its being in no small measure to the energy and enthusiasm of Fridtjof Nansen.

Already he himself had once more been to sea. The new steamer, the *Michael Sars*, had a sort of family connexion with him, for she was named after his wife's grandfather, a noted Norwegian scientist of former days. She was only 225 tons, but was equipped for sounding, temperature-taking, dredging and trawling on a scale hitherto practised only by much larger ships and with vastly more expensive equipment; and during many cruises she had proved a great success,

despite her small capacity for carrying coal. The initial cruise of the *Michael Sars* was to Iceland and Spitsbergen in the summer of 1900, and Nansen accompanied Dr. Hjort upon it. When they were off Iceland, he had to put in at Thingeyre and visit the old friends who had given him and his men hospitality twelve years before; for Nansen never forgot a friend. Farther north they came upon the fascinating line of drifting floes, and Nansen not unnaturally found himself longing to be in the thick of the struggle anew. "Out there was the life of real adventure and action." But fate had other things in store for him. As one result of this cruise he invented a new current-meter for the deep sea; a little later, in conjunction with Pettersson, his fertile mind devised an improved water-bottle for taking samples out of the depths.

He was now asked once more to assist a budding explorer; once more his clear brain and ready pen were at the applicant's disposal. Roald Amundsen, a young, powerfully-built, thorough-going seaman, who had recently returned from the *Belgica* Antarctic Expedition, proposed to take a sloop of only seventy tons through Baffin's Bay to the Magnetic Pole, and then to work his little ship through the intricate and ice-choked channels

which had baffled all nations hitherto—in a word, he proposed to sail through the North-west Passage. He had prepared himself by a thorough study of magnetism under expert tuition; and he now came to ask Nansen's advice concerning equipment. Nansen's imagination was fired by the project, into which he entered wholeheartedly; and although he afterwards modestly disclaimed any special share in the work, Amundsen was equally insistent that the success of his memorable voyage in the tiny *Gjoa* had been largely due to the foresight and organization of Nansen.

So the years passed busily away. The man of thirty-three who from the drifting *Fram* had bemoaned his enforced idleness had now become an active professor of forty-three, immersed in a hundred matters, many of which were by no means connected with his calling. Then came a shock, the result of which at the time seemed unpredictable; political troubles arose with Sweden, the shadow of war crept over Norway's fair hills; and it fell to Nansen's lot to be the chief agent in chasing that shadow away.

For many years—ever since 1814, to be exact—Norway and Sweden had been united as uneasy bedfellows under a single king; but they

had no other ties. Previously Norway had been united to Denmark for centuries; but during the Napoleonic wars the allies overwhelmed Denmark and forced her to cede Norway to Sweden as compensation for that country's having lost Finland. Thus from the start the Swedes thought of Norway as a dependency, while on the other hand the rough, God-fearing, hard-living Norsemen naturally looked with suspicion and jealousy on their more polished neighbours. Norway refused to admit the treaty, since it had been concluded without her consent; and they even appointed a Danish prince as their king (1814). On 17th May of that year the famous Constitution was drawn up, which established for all time that Norway was a free and independent country, besides fixing very narrowly the respective powers of the king and people.

But the Swedes were under the control of Bernadotte, an able but avaricious French soldier, who had been elected heir-apparent to the aged Swedish king. Bernadotte promptly declared war on Norway, and after a short resistance the patriotic government found it prudent to submit, their king abdicated, and the union was agreed to; each country to have its own laws and its own parliament, the sole bond between them being the

crown. However, the king himself was a Swede, or bore a Swedish title, and he naturally picked his advisers rather from that nation than from the rougher Norsemen, among whom the kings of Norway stayed only three years in the whole period from 1814 to 1900. In their own interests, therefore, the Norse statesmen had to be constantly on the watch against any real or imagined Swedish assumption of superiority; quarrels soon arose, which time did not heal; and to the end of the union a Norwegian remained a foreigner in Stockholm, while a Swede was a foreigner in Christiania.

One famous struggle concerned the national flag. It began as far back as 1821, by Norway's demanding her own flag (scarlet, with a blue cross with white borders) on both naval and merchant shipping. After a long while this was agreed to, as far as concerned merchant ships only, and even then the flag had also to bear the symbol of the union. The agitation flared up anew during Nansen's earlier years, and while the *Fram* was drifting across the Arctic Ocean, and her crew were solemnly celebrating Constitution Day on the ice, an act was passed at home for the third time, removing the union symbol from the flag. For the third time, too, the king (Oscar II) vetoed it,

whereupon, by the law of the land, it became effective without him.

In more important respects the Swedes were continually trying to make Norway feel her dependence, but they only called forth the national spirit more strongly. A National or Liberal party came into being in 1871, and much of its work was done during young Nansen's most impressionable years. It made a long and persistent efforts to get control of the government; for, unlike the condition of affairs in our country, the ministers were not subject to the parliament or Storthing's control at all, and their pro-Swedish policy was a constant source of grievance. If the Storthing, which had been elected by the people, decided on any measure which the ministry thought contrary to Swedish interests they advised the king to veto it; and so there was repeated friction. Four times the Storthing passed a bill making the ministry subject to parliament, and four times did the king turn it down. Then they took the drastic step of impeaching the ministers. King Oscar protested, but yielded in the end; and the entire ministry was either dismissed or fined. This happened while Nansen's thoughts were fluctuating between politics, sport and the voyage of the *Viking*.

Still greater differences between king and people were coming to a head in those days also. Despite her small size, Norway is one of the world's greatest shipping countries; her flag flies in every port, her hardy seamen roam every sea. Sweden, on the other hand, has not much maritime interest outside the Baltic. So that her foreign affairs might receive due attention, Norway wanted a separate foreign minister, but neither the Swedes nor the king would agree; and in practice a Swede was their foreign minister to the end. A Storting which was elected in 1891 to enforce the Norwegian attitude began by tackling the consular problem; for there, too, the union weighed unfairly, nearly all the consuls abroad being Swedes. What this meant you will understand from the fact that when once the change had been made at a single port (Shanghai) the Norwegian trade went up fourfold. Legally, too, Norway was perfectly in the right; the May Constitution permitted her explicitly to have her own consuls. But still the Swedes would not agree and they even threatened war in 1895, when the country was in no position to defend itself. The Storting compromised, and a commission from both sides was appointed to work out a solution; after two years' talk it decided

nothing. Meanwhile, the Norwegians had been reorganizing their defences, and by extending the franchise in 1898 they made sure that their decisions were really the voice of the people. A new ministry under Professor Hagerup made a last attempt to compromise with Sweden during 1902 and 1903; and everything seemed to have been settled satisfactorily, when the Swedish Prime Minister, Boström, dropped a bomb in the midst of the proceedings, by declaring that the proposed Norwegian consuls must be subject to the Swedish Foreign Minister (November, 1904). This was the last straw; it aroused at once the hostility of the whole nation.

The Ministry resigned. A new one, led by the wise non-partisan, Christian Michelsen, was formed from all shades of opinion. It once more brought forward the obnoxious measure, which the king has obstinately rejected; then the ministers resigned. The king knew that the whole nation was against him, but he believed with the Swedes that they would never push matters to extremities, and he refused to accept the resignation. Thereupon the Storthing met, solemnly declared that, as he had refused to exercise his functions, he was no longer king of Norway, and that by the same act the union with Sweden was dissolved. The

motion was passed without a single dissentient.

In these events Nansen, as a prominent public man, was bound to take part; but he did far more than merely support the nationalists. He was galvanized into action by the belief that Boström's deception showed the union to be quite unworkable. He thought they had come to the cross-roads, that there was no backward step possible, no turning to either side, but only a bold march forward; and he impressed this view upon thousands and thousands of his fellow-countrymen, who might otherwise have hesitated when the crisis came.

He also displayed a wise statesmanship which to most people was quite unexpected in such an ardent spirit. He saw at once that whatever the dispute between the two powers, it would be far graver if the greater nations intervened. England was only mildly interested; but the Emperor of Germany was thirsting to interfere, and only held back by doubts as to the attitude of Russia. Nansen set out to enlist foreign sympathy for the national cause. He related the history of the union and the present crisis, fairly and soberly, in a pamphlet, *Norway and the Union with Sweden*; it was published in English and had a strong influence on opinion here in favour of

Norway, a country moreover with which we had so many other things in common. Then, at the instance of his government, Nansen came over to see the British foreign minister, so as to ensure intervention if need be, and prevent a combination of other powers from crushing Norway's legitimate hopes. The minister, Lord Lansdowne, was ill, but Nansen saw the Under-Secretary, Sir T. Sanderson, and returned with satisfactory assurances. Next day King Edward VII, who had been watching the affair with his usual closeness, wrote guardedly that we could not let Norway be overwhelmed, although he thought that the Swedish threats of war were merely bluff. The king's judgment proved to be correct, for the Swedes, in fact, were in no condition to fight. King Oscar began to talk of resigning the crown, but the Norwegians must first dismantle their frontier fortresses. Meanwhile, a plebiscite showed an enormous vote in favour of dissolution; 368,200 for, only 184 against. One cannot hope to "compel" a proud, vigorous northern nation under such circumstances, and Oscar II abandoned his throne at a conference at Karlstadt, 23rd September, 1905. Shortly afterwards the Swedish parliament ratified the settlement.

Still there remained work for Nansen to do.

Norway, a country of small and scattered towns, has long possessed a strong republican element, and there was now talk of doing away with the monarchy altogether; but the majority favoured a king, as laid down by their own Constitution of 17th May. The throne was offered to prince Charles of Denmark, King Edward's son-in-law (he was the husband of Princess Maud); and Nansen was appointed as the government's agent to see the business through. The prince sounded his august and potent father-in-law, who raised no objections; but he also had ideas of his own and would not accept a throne from which a popular upheaval might eject him. He therefore demanded a referendum on the question, Monarchy or Republic, agreeing meantime to hold the crown until the question was decided. Nansen again stumped the country in favour of a monarchy. The answer was decisive; the monarchists won by four to one. The prince now took the title of King Haakon VII, and Norway has never had occasion to regret her choice.

The country's new status required that its diplomats should take their place in the capitals of the world; and nowhere was this more important than in England. Nansen was offered the post of Norwegian minister in London; he

accepted, though with inward regrets at leaving, even for a short while, his home at Lysaker and the class-rooms of the university. Early in 1906 he came to London, King Edward making him an honorary G.C.V.O.; and here he remained till the summer of 1908, absorbed in his official duties, but by no means abandoning his former activities. He enjoyed popularity, he liked the wealth of scientific society which was always open to him in the metropolis, but he cared much less for official functions, and not at all for the shifty devices which pass as "diplomacy", and the "dirty work of politics", to use his own blunt phrase. "I long to break these chains," he wrote, only a year afterwards. "I long for the woods and my free mountains. I cannot be tamed." But there were always holidays, when he could slip across to Lysaker.

Sorensen tells us a curious story of this period. The great success of Captain Scott's first journey had inspired Nansen with the idea of attacking the Antarctic himself in the *Fram*; but now Amundsen, who had also leaped into fame, wished to borrow the *Fram* for a voyage, so he said, round the world, through Bering's Strait and across the polar sea once more; and this also was in Nansen's eyes a worthy object. Nansen's

wife, who was ailing, dreaded lest he should again leave her; and on that account he gave up his own ambition and agreed to Amundsen's having the *Fram*. Strictly, of course, the *Fram* was not his to give—she belonged to the Norwegian people; but a word from Nansen would have settled Amundsen's hopes either way. The expedition took a long while to prepare, and meanwhile Nansen spoke and wrote in its favour. Imagine his state of mind, therefore, when a telegram from Madeira announced that Amundsen was bound for the Antarctic after all! This duplicity, which aroused a great deal of wrath in this country at the time, is the one great stain on a fine record. Nansen kept his feelings to himself, and was one of the first to congratulate his countryman on having attained the South Pole. As it proved, his sacrifice was in vain, for his wife died before the ship sailed (1908) leaving him with five young children.

It had long been intended that King Edward should visit the northern courts, but various delays held up the tour until May, 1908; and even then it was found diplomatic to call at Stockholm on the way to Christiania, and not *vice versa*! This visit to Norway's king, which was a huge success, marked both the culmination

and close of Nansen's first spell as a diplomat. He went back to Lysaker, to his family, and to his scientific interests; and despite many subsequent wanderings all over the world, this remained the centre of his life till the end. In the same year he became Professor of Oceanography at Christiania University, a post which he retained till his death.

During his stay in London, the explorer-scientist-diplomat took on a new rôle as student of ancient books and early manuscripts. He had rashly promised Scott Keltie to write a history of Arctic exploration, with the idea that he could dictate it offhand; but Nansen could never do anything by halves, and when he came to start the book he found so much confusion and ignorance that he had to delve deeply and ever more deeply among the old records. Experts had to be brought in to decipher certain texts; there were long discussions as to the identity of this place or that; and the result was a remarkable book, *In Northern Mists* (1911). It deals with the earliest voyages to America and Greenland, and goes no farther than the sixteenth century; the part of Arctic travel history which Nansen originally knew best never featured in it at all! It is a very valuable and entertaining work; like much of

his best material, it was published in English.

This was one activity which ran parallel with his diplomatic life; pure science was another. He delivered important papers before the Royal Geographical Society, on the difficult subject of the strange earth-movements by which coasts are drowned or upraised; at the back of these thoughts, of course, was that immense, shallow Siberian sea upon which he himself had spent so many anxious hours. A little later the same subject came up, in a paper on unsolved Polar problems; we meet with this interest in his early work again and again, right up to the end.

Nansen's was one of those curious minds which must work in two directions at once. Even during the height of the political troubles of 1904-5 his scientific half was at work; for in January, February and March, 1905, he published three important papers on ocean currents and their causes. In December of the same year, we find him once more on a platform, helping to celebrate Amundsen's North-west Passage, and entertaining the audience with a sketch of Arctic travel lore. While in London afterwards, he received the Patron's Medal of the R.G.S., on behalf of the same explorer. A little later he is to be found in the funeral procession of his respected friend

M'Clintock, greatest of all Arctic travellers except himself and Peary. Thus his original life-interest followed him about wherever he went; and behind the mask of the statesman, the patriot, the deadly earnest man of science, we can never get rid of the Greenland crossing or the Polar march.

Now that Nansen was back home once more, he soon found means of leaving it again. He acquired a little yacht, the *Veslemoy*, in which he cruised off Spitsbergen during the summer of 1912, doing research work, and almost being sunk by some terrible storms. It so happened that a party of Germans, cast ashore on that lonely land, were compelled at the same time to march across country to Advent Bay, under circumstances of appalling hardship; and several of them perished. Nansen was quite near at the time, but he knew nothing of it. Next year he went and had a talk with the leader of the party, who was still in hospital with an amputated foot; and we find him deploring the extraordinary ignorance of the conditions and lack of foresight which then (as always, in Nansen's opinion) had occasioned the disaster. He could never understand how men would take risks without being prepared for them!

CHAPTER VIII

Through Siberia

From the time when brave Sir Hugh Willoughby tried to find a North-east Passage, nearly 400 years ago, only to perish of cold and starvation on the North Russian shore, down to our own day, the short sea route to Siberia has been in men's minds. When Nansen was a boy, a bold and shrewd Englishman, Captain Wiggins, made many voyages along that coast, sometimes taking cargoes into the great river Yenesei. This stream taps the mountains of Central Asia, 1500 miles inland, besides the boundless Siberian forest; so that if a regular passage could be made from Europe, all that part of the world, which has vast mineral and timber wealth, might be opened up.

In 1912, while the *Veslemoy* was off Spitsbergen and in a fair way to sinking there, a very different vessel was battling against the floes in the Kara Sea. She was the *Correct*, a powerful steamer of

1550 tons, and was trying anew to make the Yenesei voyage, under her owner, Mr. Jonas Lied. The venture failed, but next year, 1913, he tried again; and on this occasion he offered a free trip to Nansen, whose "luck" had become proverbial; a further inducement was a river journey right up the Yenesei to the gold mines, followed by a trip along the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok and back, as the guest of the Russian government. It could be fitted in between August and October, and Nansen accepted. His travelling companions, who were also guests of Mr. Lied's firm, were M. Vostrotin, Deputy in the Russian Duma for a vast area of Siberia, and M. Loris-Melikoff, a dapper and cultured Armenian who for many years had been Secretary to the Russian Legation at Christiania.

They left Tromsøe on the 5th August, the first part of the voyage being without incident; in fact, it closely followed the story of the *Fram*, with the same fog, the same shoals and treacherous banks, and the same ice as soon as they had got into the Kara Sea. Strangely enough, too, while they were off Yalmal, sandwiched in between the ice-pack and the shore, some of those not very handsome savages, the Samoyedes, came aboard, just as they had done when Nansen was there,

twenty years before, almost to the day. They marvelled at the *Correct's* engines, her wireless equipment, and her gramophone; but what took their eye far more was the sight of the mate working a dinghy by a single oar astern. These people ate fish raw, putting it into their mouths in long strips, which they then cut off close to the lips with a knife.

Off the tundras of Yalmal the ship was held up for a week. Nansen, who spent much time up in the crow's nest—"he seemed very happy up there", said Lied, afterwards—advised keeping inshore, and his opinion, backed up by the words, "Patience, ever patience!" proved sound; for at length the ice silently drifted out to sea, and they went on without much difficulty to Dickson Island, at the mouth of the Yenesei. Meanwhile, Lied had had the urge to kill a walrus, and Nansen helped him. Walrus, however, do not die very easily, and there was a pretty exciting and, for the older man, exhausting time before they took the dinghy back with the prize in tow and the stern of the boat under water.

Off Dickson Island the mouth of the river is twenty miles wide, but it is extremely shallow and they went aground repeatedly. Here they landed to hunt reindeer, in wet, boggy plains which were

buried in dense grey mist. Nansen, after stalking a herd of fourteen deer, had the misfortune to be detected, and they ran off before he could get a shot. It struck him that the others might be stalking the same deer from another direction, so he hailed them, and he adds: "I remembered a mighty Norwegian Nimrod, who got into the middle of a flock of sheep in a fog among the mountains, and shot fifteen, thinking that they were reindeer; not to mention the man who shot a cow for a duck." Fog does strange things. Elsewhere he tells how a Norse pilot once sent a ship full speed astern in a fog, because he saw something floating in the water in front, only to find that the object was a broken baler!

They went up a magnificent waterway, but so shallow outside the main channel that the lead was constantly out; the brown river was full of delicious sturgeon and small white whales. At Nosonovski Island a steamboat with a train of lighters met them; here the *Correct's* cargo of cement was to be unloaded, but the work proceeded so slowly that Nansen gave up all hope of reaching his rendezvous inland, when suddenly a little motor-boat arrived. She was the *Omul*, and had been sent all the way from Yeneseisk, about 1000 miles, simply to fetch him; an act of

true Russian hospitality! While waiting at this place Nansen took a long walk over the flat and muddy island, with a gun, a pointer which would not point, and the Scotch cook's mate, Campbell, in search of game. They sank in mud up to the knees; jumped from tuft to tuft of grass, slithered into the ooze, and got into a terrible state, but shot nothing except a single young ptarmigan which the pointer refused to fetch; meanwhile, it was drizzling all the time. When they got back, the boat had gone away, and they had to turn out some Samoyede fishermen before they could return to the ship. Such are the joys of hunting!

This was disappointing. But Lied had also promised him a steak from a mammoth, 20,000 years old or thereabouts, which had been disinterred during the previous winter; unfortunately the dogs had eaten it all, much to Nansen's secret relief.

The *Omul* had a tiny saloon with two sofas which had to be turned up whenever one passed in or out; there was an equally small sleeping cabin with three berths. Yet she now had to carry, besides her little fat captain and the engineer, three passengers, of whom Vostrotin and Nansen were more than ample to fill the space; but they got along very well, on the whole. The

engineer steered his craft from dawn to dusk and very rarely went aground; each night the ship anchored in the river. On the first day out the engineer was somewhat festive, the engine decidedly restive; and he explained that it had water in it. "We came to the conclusion," says Nansen, "that it was not so much water in the engine as brandy in the engineer", a diagnosis which proved to be correct, for next day the engineer was sober and his machine behaved admirably.

After passing for days through barren, almost untenanted plains, they came to the edge of the forest, first a few low birch trees only four or five feet high, then stouter and taller birch and willows, then the massed pines, spruce and larch of the great Siberian woodland. Whenever possible, Nansen landed to stretch his long legs and to roam off into the forest with one or other of his companions. Throughout the trip he is found examining the fishes, the methods of fishing, the natives in their homes, the traders and how they live. He peers across the great lonely wastes, scenting their singular charm; and when the trees are thickly massed together he longs to lie out there in the forest before a glowing log fire, and thinks: "Assuredly men were not made to

live in towns". At fifty-two he was really very little "tamer" than he had been at twenty.

They passed patches of yellowing birch and deep-red mountain ash, sometimes with the distant pall of smoke from a forest fire; wood had no value there, and when people wanted to clear the ground they simply burnt it. Nansen, noting the fine stands of Siberian spruce trees, thought how well they would do if transplanted to the equally unfavourable climate of northern Norway. His first thought was always of Norway.

The whole of this vast territory, with its roving, half-savage and generally drunken natives, the Russian traders at the scattered settlements, and the fishing villages along the river, formed part of Vostrotin's parliamentary district. Green though it was above, the wilderness had another side; for here, as in most parts of northern Siberia, the ground was frozen down to many feet, sheets of pure ice and mud alternately. It is in the cuttings of such ground that the famous mammoths have been found, with their flesh still fresh after thousands of years in the earth.

Nansen photographed incessantly, not always with the best results; nor on the whole was there much to be seen, one bank of the river being cliffy and forested, the other flat and dreary;

between was the tranquil, coffee-coloured river, more than a mile wide, and so shallow on the whole that once when the engineer turned aside to light a cigarette the *Omul* ran aground.

As they went on, more and more signs of life appeared; the villages were larger and closer together. On landing at these places, one had first to climb over a great mound of cow-dung which had been dumped on the shore; and to walk down the village street was impossible, because as a rule it was ankle-deep in mud; one had to use a single line of rickety planks from house to house. At one of these places Nansen induced some Yenesei-Ostiaks, a curious and dwindling native tribe, to pose for him. He also visited one of their sorcerers, an old blind man, in billowy clothes, with a mask on his face and a bride's crown on his head, who was reputed to read the future, besides casting out devils and curing diseases. He practised his art for the visitors' benefit, at one rouble per head. One of his predictions was singular; he said that "a great universal war was coming", and as we all know, next year it did.

They now approached Vostrotin's headquarters, Yeneseisk, a large mining town of wooden houses at the entrance to the gold country; there were

corn lands along the river now, and telegraph stations in the villages, but nowhere could Nansen send a message, because the telegraphists did not know the Roman alphabet and he knew no Russian. It is curious that although he was to be closely connected with Russia for fifteen years he never mastered its tongue, although otherwise an expert linguist.

At Yeneseisk, which would be one of the first towns to benefit if Jonas Lied's plans bore fruit, the visitors received a civic welcome, with the mayor in his chain of office, the chief of police in full uniform, and all the notables of the place. Nansen visited the Higher School for Boys and told them about the *Fram*, Vostrotin translating. In approved western style, the whole school then received a holiday. What an experience for these boys of the little town in the heart of lonely Siberia, to meet Nansen!

The mayor and corporation gave a formal luncheon, with much goodwill and speech-making, but with amusing language difficulties. The prospects of the *Correct's* voyage leading to permanent traffic were discussed, all in fluent Russian, "of which", says Nansen, "I did not understand a word; but some of it was translated. Then the principal of the school made a speech

in Esperanto, of which I understood just as much, and which was not translated, as there was nobody else who understood it either. I replied to all these speeches in English, which none of our hosts understood, but which Vostrotin translated into Russian."

After a visit to the local museum—museums were always a magnet which attracted Nansen, however small or out-of-the-way they might be—they started for the railway town of Krasnoyarsk, 300 miles away, by road. They went in a tarantass, or four-wheeled Russian carriage. It has no seat, and no springs worth talking about, and is drawn by three horses abreast, the coachman driving full speed all the time, with shouts, imprecations, prayers, cajolery, incessantly. The road was tremendously wide and full of holes and loose sand; the passengers lying on the floor with as many cushions as they could find, and praying for the end to come quickly. They were shaken up so much that Nansen, who had false teeth, had to keep his mouth well shut lest they should jump out and be lost when he unexpectedly bounced in the air!

Krasnoyarsk is a large and wealthy town. Before starting, he had arranged to be there by 25th September; and on that very evening they

arrived, despite the countless chances of delay during the long and varied journey. Although it was pouring with rain, bonfires had been lighted in the streets. There was an official reception from the mayor, the prefect of police, the geographical society, and all the local notables; a triumphal arch had been erected, above which the Norwegian and Russian flags hung limply; and a procession of people with blazing torches followed the carriages into the town. At this place Nansen had to give a lecture on the *Correct's* voyage, his good friend Vostrotin acting as interpreter.

At Krasnoyarsk they met Nansen's host for the rest of the journey, Mr. Wurtzel, an active and able engineer who had charge of all construction work on the immense Russian State Railways. In Wurtzel's comfortable saloon coach Nansen travelled round the mountainous southern shore of Lake Baikal, across the desolate brown Mongolian and Manchurian lands, and down the Amur to Vladivostok and back. Where new work was in progress he went by car; then his hosts sent him back to St. Petersburg at their expense. The tour was rapid, but he kept a keen eye on everything—the railway work, the people, the crops, the fisheries; and the Russians found in this frank Norseman a model of tact and discretion. On the

unfinished stretch of line which was to provide an alternative link with Russia's eastern capital in the event of a further war with Japan, Nansen received a shock; for they had decided to name a station after him. This was fame indeed!

The account of this journey was published in 1914, during the early months of the Great War. It drew attention, of course, to the possibilities of communication between the allies and hard-pressed Russia by way of the Arctic, but in practice the connexion was established nearer home (at Murmansk and Archangel); and although Jonas Lied's voyage was a success, and he endeavoured to follow it up with others, real progress has only been made under Bolshevik rule, where the power of a whole nation is supported by a complete disregard of expense. The Russians now have on the Yenesei, not far from the spot where Nansen hunted all day in the mud, a town of 20,000 people, with electric light and streets that are paved with wood. Fresh vegetables are grown there half underground, and with the help of artificial light and warmth. The children have good schools, and everything is organized *à la Soviet*. A powerful fleet of ice-breaking ships keeps open a passage along the treacherous Siberian coast, largely with the help of aeroplanes

as spotters; a device, by the way, which Nansen had recommended long ago. To quote two words which he himself was very fond of using, *Tempora mutantur* (Times are changed.)

But despite all this commendable enterprise, man was not meant—at least in a civilized state—to dwell in Northern Siberia, with its intense winter cold, its boundless swamps and grassy plains; and the only thing which keeps the Russians there is the determination to have an alternative route to the Far East, should a war deprive them of the vital railway lines.

CHAPTER IX

The Great War, and After

During the Great War the Scandinavian powers were neutral, or rather, they were as neutral as circumstances permitted. Germany was clamouring for Norwegian copper and Norwegian herrings; Great Britain forestalled her by buying up the entire surplus of both. Norway's sympathies were generally with the British, but she had to tread warily in the dangerous tracks of neutrality, with the Kaiser's sabres rattling in her ears. A Union of Defence was formed, with Nansen as its president. He himself detested War, and he thought that the countries of Europe had brought it on themselves by their former intrigues. This was natural, since he had friends in practically every one of the allied and other capitals. Nansen, like his country, was fortunately placed outside the whirlpool. But as the War dragged on a crisis approached in which they both became involved. At the end of 1916 the Germans decided to intensify their submarine campaign

and, by sinking every British ship and neutral ship at sight, to reduce proud Albion to her knees. It mattered nothing to the autocrats of Berlin that by forcing Englishmen to ration their sugar, meat and potatoes, they were also cutting off the corn supplies of Norway, besides many other things which that state had come to consider necessary imports. It also mattered nothing to the same apostles of civilization what happened to the crews of the torpedoed vessels; if unable to swim, then they could sink. The position became so serious for Norway that many ships would not put out to sea at all; and when Britain offered to guarantee them by putting them under her flag, Germany retaliated with a threat of war. In these circumstances it was decided to send a commission under Nansen to the U.S.A., to negotiate for supplies to be sent over in American ships. It did not sail until July, 1917, by which time America herself was at war with Germany; and there were long and difficult negotiations before Nansen at last brought the business to a successful issue, in April, 1918.

Meanwhile, his other half could not be idle, even abroad, and with state affairs on his hands. He addressed scientific meetings on the abstruse and much-argued question, Does the amount

of heat that we receive from the sun alter over long periods, and if so, why?—a matter which they all discussed, while husbands, brothers, cousins, were dying at the front; their spirit being what was called in England at that time “carrying on as usual”.

During his stay in the United States, Nansen met Mr. Herbert Hoover, who was already doing valuable relief work, and with whom he was to have many connexions after the War.

The Great War was a ghastly tragedy for all concerned; nobody and nothing gained by it, except the battlefields which were manured with the blood of the slain. When it ended, in November, 1918, there was a world-wide cry: “This must not happen again”; and the chief Powers, headed by President Wilson, established the League of Nations. The League has justified its existence in a score of ways, even though it has proved quite incapable of stopping war or injustice between one country and another. Nansen was a firm supporter of the idea from the outset, and when Norway joined the League he was appointed its representative at Geneva. He had not been there long before they found him work to do, which was utterly different from the labours of his past life, but which he continued to combine

with that life to the end. Shortly before this (1919) Nansen married again, his second wife being Madame Sigrun Munthe.

His entry into international politics was characteristic. Russia, torn by civil war, with the Bolsheviks in power at Moscow, a British army in North Russia attacking them, and a Czechoslovakian army also attacking them in the Ukraine, was not at first involved in the general peace. The western statesmen in particular, who had been horrified by the excesses of the revolution, would have nothing to do with Bolshevism, and the Bolsheviks in return naturally refused to recognize the League of Nations. Meanwhile, famine and distress spread over the unhappy country, and Nansen's generous heart was touched to the quick. He, too, disliked Bolshevism; in fact, he disliked it as much as he disliked dictatorships. But men, women and children were dying of starvation, a fact which in his eyes stood above mere politics or prejudices. It was unthinkable to him that civilized people should allow their neighbours to perish so callously. He therefore addressed an appeal, on compassionate grounds, to Mr. Lloyd George, Clemenceau and Orlando, who then held all the power at Paris, for help to be sent to starving Russia; but the allies would

not budge. Only if the Bolsheviks would cease their hostility could help be granted, and for the present the effort at relief failed.

Meanwhile, a still more pressing problem was thrust upon him. The war had left its prisoners in every belligerent country, to the number of nearly half a million, scattered in labour camps, or behind barbed wire, or in prisons, all over Europe. To get them back to their own countries was an urgent task which required the patience of Job combined with the skill of a conjurer; the League of Nations offered Nansen the job, and after some hesitation he accepted it. In many cases identification papers had been lost. There were men who did not want to return home, and countries which were none too anxious to receive them. There were wounded prisoners in every stage of disability, misery, poverty, disease and filth. The world, over-anxious to get back to normal times, had placed a strain upon its depleted marine, which was breaking it; ships either could not be found at all, or could only be procured by a judicious combination of high prices and cajolery. A great number of the prisoners of war were Russians, and, as we have seen, the Soviet would have nothing to do with the League, or the League with it. Nansen's was

indeed a herculean task; but he and his able band of helpers accomplished it, although stinted in regard to money, means of transport and sometimes even the free commodity of goodwill. Their labours began in April, 1920; in six months half the prisoners of war had been repatriated; and in July, 1922, when the final report of the Commission was issued, the work had been completed and more than 400,000 men returned to their homes. We should never forget that after the generals and strategists had spent four years in tearing the fabric of humanity apart, Nansen and his assistants were the men who stitched it together again.

Although his hands were already full, further humanitarian work was now thrust upon him. The Russian Revolution had driven abroad some one and a half millions of her people, many of whom were absolutely dependent on the charity of the countries which gave them shelter; and to meet the need—for people everywhere are usually generous if you appeal to their better instincts, be they British, American, German, or even Turkish—a good many voluntary associations had been formed. It was suggested that the League of Nations ought to take over this work and appoint a High Commissioner for Refugees. The

League thought of Nansen. He agreed, and from that date (September, 1921) until his death in 1930, he continued to hold this onerous post, which carried a great deal of responsibility without any salary, and which earned for its holder many a hard knock, besides undying fame. There was, in fact, not the least reason why he should have added to his many responsibilities in this way, except from pure love of humanity, and distress at the thought of widespread suffering.

The first trouble was the proof of nationality. Almost all countries had standing orders that no Russian refugees should enter, and by international red-tape none could get out either. Scarcely any of these one and a half million aliens had passports; they had had to flee too rapidly for that; thus they had no right to stay in their country of refuge and no legal means of leaving it—technically, they did not exist! Nansen solved this enigma by inducing the various states concerned to accept a certificate, the famous "Nansen Certificate", with his head on it, which gave the unfortunates an identification slip.

He was less successful in other aspects of the Russian problem. The famine broke out more severely than ever; people were dying in hundreds of thousands; but the eyes of the states-

men of Europe were averted. The people were only Bolsheviki, let them die, was in fact their attitude, although they did not say it so blatantly. Nansen, Hoover, the "Save the Children" Union, and many other bodies, all purely voluntary charities, did what the governments refused to do: they recognized the right of suffering humanity to relief. In a bitter speech at Geneva Nansen had said: "Is it possible that Europe can sit quietly and do nothing? In the name of humanity, in the name of everything noble and sacred to us, I appeal to you who have wives and children of your own to consider what it means to see women and children perishing of starvation." For this he was basely attacked, as a disguised advocate of the Bolsheviki; meanwhile, listen to what was actually taking place, in his own words, for Nansen was not prone to exaggerate. "In Stalingrad and neighbouring towns heartrending scenes were witnessed. The grass was parched. There was no grain to be had, and people pounded down the bones of horses to take its place. The winter was so cold that those who fell down dying in the streets froze to the ground before the breath had left their bodies. Bodies were dug up from churchyards to be eaten; some people in their frenzy even killed

their children for food. In addition, spotted fever was raging, and over 3,000,000 people perished from starvation or typhus." This was what he and his coadjutors in the work of mercy fought against, on platforms and through the press, all over the world; but when the relief arrived, adds Nansen sadly, "it came too late, and too little of it".

For his efforts in the cause of peace the Norwegian Storting awarded him the valuable Nobel Peace Prize in 1922 (£8000). Nansen turned the money over to the help of the Russian sufferers.

Two other refugee problems with which Nansen was soon connected were those of the Greeks and the Armenians. In 1922 Greece and her age-old foe, Turkey, were at war. It ended disastrously for the Greeks, hundreds of thousands of whom fled from Asia Minor into Europe, while many others were imprisoned by the Turks and forced to work in labour battalions—a sure road to a speedy death under such taskmasters. Nansen was asked to find means of dealing with the fugitives, and he proceeded to Greece accordingly. The nature of these refugee problems is three-fold. A place must be found where the unhappy exiles can settle; work must be found for them until they can become self-supporting; and

money must be borrowed from somewhere to set on foot the project of restoring them into useful workers. Nansen, who suffered from no false or squeamish ideas, despite his strong humanitarianism, gave the Turks a *quid pro quo*. The property of all the Asiatic Greeks had been seized. He now proposed to turn out of Thrace some 400,000 Turks, send them to Asiatic Turkey in exchange for the Greek prisoners in the labour battalions, and house the fugitives in the vacated Turkish houses. Despite some outcry, this was done. The League smiled upon the project for a loan; and the Greek nation, reinforced by about one and a half million souls (which was equal to one-third of the former population) succeeded through agricultural and other work in absorbing this immense addition to its numbers.

In Armenia he was less successful. By cruelties and horrors which almost defy belief the Turks had in five years wiped out a million Christian Armenians, or one-third of the population; of the remainder, many were scattered about Europe, many more still held about half of their former country, under the powerful protection of the Moscow Soviet. A scheme was put forward to place some of these refugees in Russian Armenia, by irrigating a desert there and turning them into

agriculturists; it needed a million of money and a good deal of courage, but it was well thought out and seemed perfectly practicable.. Nansen, who had repeatedly refused to take up the problem, well knowing the difficulties involved, at last allowed himself to be persuaded; and in the summer of 1925 he toured Armenia and the Caucasus, as head of a commission of experts, who saw everything with their eyes before recommending that the project should be adopted. To Nansen's disgust, the League would not adopt his recommendation, although it had all along expressed sympathy with the martyred people; he learned now, even more clearly than in 1921, that when nations are groaning under difficulties of their own, and some other nation which needs help is a very long way off, their charity wears a little thin. He even went to the length of resigning, but was induced to remain.

The Armenian journey produced two travel books from his pen, *Armenia and the Near East* (1928), and *Through the Caucasus to the Volga*, the original edition of which appeared only a few months before his death, and in England not till 1931. They are full of glimpses of Nansen's personality, and they show that he had mastered the history, customs and way of thinking of the

people whom he sought to help, a matter which statesmen have not always been careful about in the past. He was particularly bitter against the various British prime ministers who had promised much to Armenia but had done nothing; for he could not understand that they, like him, were stirred to the depths by indignation at the Turkish atrocities, but when it came to action found themselves unable to move the democracies behind them. For you must understand that the average Londoner is much more concerned about having to travel twenty in a railway carriage than about any amount of horrors and torture 2500 miles away; and this, after all, is only human nature, however much our sympathies may lead us in a higher direction.

CHAPTER X

His Last Enterprise and Death

In 1926 Nansen was elected Rector of the ancient University at St. Andrews, an honorary post, but one of great distinction, which had been held by many noble characters in the past. The great feature of the day is the new Rector's address; Nansen's was an inspiring one, his subject "Adventure". You may find it in the libraries, as part of a little booklet (*Adventure and Other Papers*); if so, read it. All that need be quoted here is this: "Let me tell you one secret of such so-called successes as there may have been in my life, and here I believe I give you really good advice. It was to burn my boats and demolish the bridges behind me. Then one loses no time in looking behind when one should have enough to do in looking ahead. Then there is no chance for you or your men but forward! You have to do or die."

Here, too, he practised what he preached, up to the end. In 1929, when aircraft had flown over the frozen northern ocean many times, and their

possibilities were fully realized for scientific work, Nansen became president of a new society, the Aeroarctic. It included representatives of twenty countries and was to promote scientific study of the Arctic from the air. They proposed to use the *Graf Zeppelin*, to establish a network of stations on the ice whence weather reports could be received, to sound the uncharted seas by means of an echo sounder (dropping the line in the ocean from the ship at any convenient lane), and, in a word, to carry out a programme of research which was utterly novel. They would start from Northern Norway in the spring of 1930, travelling via Greenland and America to Fairbanks, in Alaska, where the government of the U.S.A. had undertaken to build a mooring mast specially. Nansen himself would take command, although in his sixty-ninth year. Many special instruments had been devised, and some of them were ready. To provide against contingencies, the ship would carry sledges, sledge dogs and stores for ninety days for the whole party. The old keen organizing brain was at work once more, and if this expedition had taken place Nansen would have added yet another to his many titles to fame, for it is inconceivable that the enterprise should have failed.

But it was not to be. Most of the funds were to be put up by the Hearst Press. He also sent out a memorandum appealing for financial assistance (January, 1930). But then came disaster, sudden and irreparable. Nansen, who had never been unwell for more than a few days at any time, fell ill of a serious disease. In May he was apparently well again. There was to be the usual celebration of Constitution Day on the 17th, and he was to be the voice of the people. But on the morning of the 13th, as he was sitting in his chair at Lysaker, talking to a visitor, he suddenly sat up, placed his hand on his heart and fell back. Fridtjof Nansen was dead.

They buried him in the great Church of Our Saviour, beside the Market Square, among the people he had served so well. Its immense tower, standing foursquare to all the tempests of heaven, is a symbol of the resolution of the dead within. And not all the multitudes who saw him pass, nor all the messages of respect and sympathy that came to Lysaker from every quarter of the globe, could more than echo this thought of the dead hero: There goes the last of a very great and noble man.

